

How Well Does Your Team Really Work?

Why is it that when smart leaders gather to function as a leadership team, so often the team gets stuck? Why is it that the team as a whole seems less smart than its individual members? Why can't the team generate strong results? Why doesn't its supposed teamwork pay off?

Does the paradox and frustration of smart leaders working as a less-smart team describe your own situation? Consider these questions:

- Do you doubt your team really pulls its collective weight?
- During your team meetings, do you ever wish you could be elsewhere, or that the faces at the table could be different?
- When your boss—an executive or your board—asks you what your team is accomplishing toward a strategic goal, do you sometimes think, “What can I say that’s both true and upbeat?”
- Do you suspect some of your team members resent how much time they spend in your meetings? Do you feel like much of your team meeting time is wasted time?

If you've been speed-reading up to now, slow down for a minute to really think about these questions: How effective is the team you lead at reaching its most important objectives? How agile is your team at recognizing major challenges and deciding what to do about them? What results does your team achieve by working together that its members couldn't gain by working independently? How much does the team contribute to your own ability to make the best decisions possible? How accountable do other members of the team really feel to each other for what the team must accomplish? How much do team members enhance one another's work outside the team?

You and your team you may be getting along with business and each other, but I can all but guarantee you that you are all working from a premise that hugely limits your team's potential. You didn't create this problem, but it's holding all of you back. The cause? The idea, widely held almost as an article of faith, that *there is one leader in the room*.

"ONE LEADER IN THE ROOM"?

What makes me so sure the team you lead falls short of its potential? The answer has to do with *mindset*: the set of core values and assumptions from which individuals and groups operate. It is the way of seeing that shapes every thought, feeling, and behavior. In even moderately challenging situations, virtually all leaders tend to use what I call a *unilateral control mindset*, despite the negative results it generates. Research conducted by Chris Argyris and Don Schön in the 1970s found that under pressure, 98 percent of professionals used this approach.¹ Their study covered six thousand individuals, and over the decades since then, my colleagues and I have analyzed thousands more cases in which our clients have faced challenging situations where they were not as effective as they wanted to be. The clients include professional men and women ranging from CEOs to first-level supervisors, including engineers, physicians, sales and marketing experts, scientists, HR and OD consultants, finance experts, and educators in corporate, governmental, and nonprofit

organizations from more than twelve countries. Among all those thousands, we have identified fewer than ten leaders who did not use the unilateral control approach when a serious challenge reduced their effectiveness. Despite all the developments in leadership over the last forty years, when it comes to challenging situations almost all leaders slip into the same mindset. They have reasons for doing so, but there are also good reasons (and ways) to change it.

Traditionally, when people think of the leader of an organization, division, or team, they think of the *person* who has the greatest authority, such as the CEO, president of the division, or team leader. And almost always, they think of that person as the sole leader of that unit. They assign many leadership responsibilities to that leader, the most obvious being that the leader has the right and corresponding duty to make the decisions for the team. This perception of a leader as the one leader in the room translates into considering that leader solely responsible for all the leadership of the team: guiding the direction of the meeting, challenging the entire group's thinking, and raising concerns about team members' performance. This one-leader-in-the-room approach requires the one in the hot seat to be all-seeing, all-knowing, and all-doing, and to guide the whole content and process of the meeting. It's as if the team is a boat with one person serving as designer, captain, navigator, and engineer at the same time, and the rest of the crew merely show up and row.

Does any of that resonate with you right now? If so, it's no surprise. All leaders have run up against the untenable expectations and responsibilities of this traditional notion of what a leader does.

TAKE THE SHORT SURVEY

This book can help you with real problems you're experiencing as a leader on the job and in the other organizations that make up your life. To help you identify what's at the heart of the problem, go to www.schwarzassociates.com/resources/survey/. Complete the

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survey—a three- to five-minute investment—and consider the analysis you see based on your answers. Each item gets at some aspect of how the unilateral control approach or mindset undercuts the actual effectiveness of a team. (The analysis is framed in terms of the core values of an alternative mindset called mutual learning that I introduce later in this chapter.)

STUCK IN UNILATERAL CONTROL: AN EXAMPLE

John Haley had recently been promoted to group president of a global design and manufacturing company. But John and his leadership team were stuck.

The business was underperforming financially, and they needed to turn it around. They were developing a new strategy but having trouble finalizing it and moving into action. In meetings, leadership team members would routinely agree to an element of the new strategy (or be silent) and then come to John individually after the meeting to tell him why he shouldn't follow through on what the team had apparently decided. Every time John held another team meeting to address the issue, people kept coming to him afterward with the same sort of advice. People weren't saying in the team what they were really thinking. Instead they were only speaking to John in private. This pattern made it impossible to get a real strategy in place to generate the numbers they needed.

Why were team members reluctant to discuss the issues in the full group? All the team members acted as though they were necessarily right and a win-lose atmosphere pervaded the room. If one member brought up an idea, others who disagreed would quickly shoot it down or dismiss it. People asked few questions of each other—and when they did, it was mostly to make a point, rather than to understand another member's view.

John needed his leaders to be more accountable to each other and to the business as a whole. Each of the team members led either a business unit or a staff function that supported all the business units. In John's mind, the team members were interdependent and needed to work closely together to identify and take advantage of potential synergies among the business units, but they weren't acting that way. To John, this meant that members needed to be asking each other about their businesses and challenging each other. But as John explained, "No one questioned the other leaders' business unit performance even though there was variability. No one said: 'Hey Joe, why are your expenses so high?' My fear was that they were doing it in their heads but not articulating their concerns."

Team members were reluctant to hold their peers accountable, partly because they were concerned about putting others on the spot and, in turn, being challenged by others. By going to John after the meetings, they thought they were being compassionate; they could raise their concerns with John privately and get them addressed indirectly, rather than having to air differences of opinion openly in the full group.

John wasn't aware that his own operating system—his mindset—was contributing to the problem he was complaining about. His unilateral control model of leadership led him to see it as solely his job to hold individual team members accountable, rather than placing a burden on them to hold each other accountable. This reinforced the team members' mindset that they didn't need to hold each other accountable. John and his leadership team were stuck; until they got unstuck, they weren't going to make any progress in turning the business around. John and his team needed a new operating system to learn how to get unstuck and to turn the business around. With time and work to change their mindset, they did just that. In a few months, they were able to craft a strategy that had the full support of the entire team and that they began to implement. The new strategy and the way the team worked together paid off. Over the next few years, the operating group increased their revenue by more than 400 percent.

WHY LEADERS STAY STUCK

I'm not the first to point out that leaders who use a unilateral control approach undermine the power of teams. Others have noted the inherent tension between acting from a mindset of unilateral control and simultaneously expecting that your direct reports share accountability for results.² So, given that the problem is widely recognized, why don't leaders choose another way? Why don't leaders simply get unstuck?

One reason is that, like John and his team, people aren't fully aware of the mindset they are actually in. In your own organization, I'm guessing you hear other leaders (perhaps your boss?) use language that espouses openness, cooperation, and the sharing of accountability between peer members of a team, but when you listen to or watch the same leaders in challenging situations, they seem to be guided by an opposite mindset, unilateral control, without recognizing the discrepancy.

This isn't simply a matter of saying one thing and doing another. If it were, it would be easy to change. The problem is that *in challenging situations, the mindset leaders use is rarely the one they think they are using.*³

For example, imagine that I gave you a situation with your team and asked you what principles you would use to guide your behavior—what I call your “espoused mindset.”⁴ Let's say you're working with your team to develop a strategy and you and the team members are at odds. In this situation, you might tell me that you believe it's important to get everyone aligned, important that all of them share their own thinking, important that others should try to understand different perspectives, for people to be curious, and so on. You might continue by saying that your role would be to create the kind of environment in which this discussion could occur. However, if I could video record the meeting and then dub in another face and voice in place of yours, you might well note that the leader's behavior doesn't seem to match the

espoused mindset you shared with me. Instead of asking people what the group might be missing, the leader simply figures out what it's missing and tells others about it. Instead of trying to understand everyone's perspective, the leader tries to convince others why their view is wrong. It's not simply a matter of saying one thing but doing another. It's that the mindset that really guides the behavior is not the mindset you think you have. That sort of gap is easy to see in someone else, but human nature usually blinds people to it in themselves.

People tend to be unaware of using a unilateral control mindset. They use it automatically, without thinking about it. And that unawareness serves a purpose. It simplifies the problem and avoids an awkward realization of personal priorities: *What I really need to do in this meeting is make sure that no matter what happens, my solution prevails.*

When people *are* consciously aware of using a unilateral control mindset, they believe that what they're doing makes sense and that the behavior is for the good of the team and organization. From their own perspective, they are acting in a way that will get the best results, regardless of what others might think. Unfortunately, it won't.

A second reason leaders stay stuck, clinging to a unilateral control, one-leader-in-the-room approach, is the difficulty of imagining a workable alternative. Everyone knows that opening up decision making to the team can get the group stuck because people have conflicting ideas and conflict is inevitable, uncomfortable, and painful to deal with.

Team members don't want painful conflict either, so they help the leader stay stuck. They depend on the formal leader's use of control, reinforcing it even as they complain about it. They see it as the formal leader's role to raise and resolve difficult issues that are hindering the team's performance, even as they privately express frustration that the leader either doesn't see the issues or doesn't address them properly. They see it as the formal leader's role to give feedback to problematic peers even as they complain to others about

not seeing changes in peers' behavior. They believe the leader ought to have personal insight into the leader's own contributions to team problems—while they withhold the information that would make the leader's understanding possible.

Leaders and members all think, "That's the formal leader's job. That is what leaders get paid for." Members expect the boss to make things happen without realizing that they themselves have a lock on the information on which action could be taken and need to be accountable for sharing that information, speaking up, and expressing their needs. As a result, all participants continue to act in ways that reinforce the roles and results they're dissatisfied with.

These aren't problems of being poor bosses or poor direct reports. These are problems with how people think of the relationship between a formal leader and team members. But when they do seek some other means of team success, they try sundry tools or programs that don't actually address or fundamentally challenge how they view the relationship between a formal leader and team members. They try "the participative leader," leader-generated "cultures of commitment," and the "empowering leader." They fill their leadership bags with tools to "motivate, inspire, and engage" others. But at the end of the day, they often feel weighed down by the tools and not much more effective as leaders. They seem like salespeople trying to get the team's buy-in to get things done. But all these methods allow everyone to cling to the same basic limiting assumption: that others need to change so that the formal leader's ideas can thrive, largely intact. Yes, the formal leader may need to make some superficial changes to help the team make major changes, but it's still the job of the formal leader to know what the team needs to do and how it needs to do it.

So that is how groups get stuck in a mindset of unilateral control. But there's good news: people can identify and change that basic limiting assumption. An alternative mindset to unilateral control and one-leader-in-the-room is available, and you are capable of achieving it.

CHANGING AN UNPRODUCTIVE MINDSET

You have a choice. You can challenge your team's mindset of unilateral control. You can ask yourself how true it really is that only others need to change. You can choose to accept the possibility that your ideas may not always be right. You can choose to put the team to work—a team whose members are accountable not just to you but to the team as a whole. You can choose to develop a team where all team members share in responsibility for the team's leadership needs.

Changing how you lead begins with changing your own mindset. Changing your mindset as a leader and changing the mindsets of other members of your team mean changing some basic assumptions and values you hold about what formal leaders do and how they interact with their teams, as well as your own role as the leader and your direct reports' roles as members of your team. Broadly, you will need to do four things to make this happen:

- Take on some fresh assumptions:
 - Leader work comes from every chair.
 - Team members also need to change.
 - Team members share accountability among themselves.
 - The whole team works from the same guiding ideas.
- Align structures (systems, policies, and processes) to support those new assumptions.
- Take an approach you can openly share and spread to others on your team and throughout your organization.
- Build trust across relationships.

Adopting Fresh Assumptions

The new assumptions I just listed will allow you to move away from a mindset of unilateral control. Here's how they each work.

Leader Work Comes from Every Chair

The reason leaders balk at the idea of shared leadership is that they are desperately clinging to control. But an effective approach for

leading teams requires letting go of the mindset of control that results in one leader as the all-powerful, all-responsible sole decision maker for the group. Formal leaders do still need to hold responsibility for how decisions will ultimately be made. But they also need to spread control around the team and redefine team leadership as the ability to share responsibility for the team's functioning. This means that team leaders need to recognize that at any given time, the insight and ability to move the team forward productively might come from anyone at the table. That requires a redefinition of what it means to be the formal leader of a team—the leader isn't the *only* leader anymore.

Team Members Also Need to Change

The next assumption involves how the team thinks of the leader's role and how each member works with the leader. If the leader stops with personal change, over time team members who stick with old assumptions will behave in ways that force the only-leader-in-the-room role back into play.

How will they do this? Team members will gradually and naturally exert pressure that makes it happen. In a framework of unilateral control, team members see it as the formal leader's role to raise and resolve difficult issues that are hindering team performance and to give feedback to problematic peers as they complain to others that they are not seeing any changes in their peers' behavior. Team members figure the leader should just know whatever is wrong with anyone's behavior (including the leader's own), so it's OK for them to withhold the information that would help the leader see these things.

Team members need to realize that they are part of a collective team mindset that defines the relationship between themselves and their formal leader. They also need to see that leadership issues are not solely the concern of the team's formal leader, and that team leadership can—in fact, must—come from everyone on the team. They need to see that the leadership *role* is fluid, flexible, adaptive,

and shareable in real time. For example, all team members need to see that at any time they can voice an observation that the team is making some perilous untested assumption. Any team member can and should help the team identify the key interests that are in conflict as the team tries to solve a problem. Any team member can and should help the formal leader see what's happening if the leader requests team input but seems to have already made a decision. When a leadership team learns to do this, they can work together as a more effective system. They are greater than the sum of their parts.

Team Members Share Accountability Among Themselves

If the relationship between leaders and other members of the team changes so that leadership roles are more flexible, it follows that the relationship among team members will also need to change. In the traditional team, accountability flows in a hub-and-spoke configuration. Members occupy nodes isolated at the ends of spokes, primarily accountable to the formal leader at the hub or center of the team. The formal leader, responsible for the overall team, therefore bears the stress of each spoke and keeps its node accountable. This traditional hub-and-spoke configuration assigns team members little real accountability and little need to commit to one another.

A better pattern can strengthen accountability and commitment. In it team members become accountable to each other, not simply to the formal leader. Team issues that team members would normally not address at all or talk about only to the leader become issues for them to address *with* the team. This includes their concerns about the team not meeting deadlines and about how work quality differences among team members may be creating a negative impact on them and other team members. This type of approach requires letting all team members identify what their strengths are and what areas they are trying to develop, so that they can give each other feedback and support. At the heart of team accountability is the notion that one of the most basic kinds of accountability is to give and receive

honest if difficult feedback with your coworkers—no matter what your position.

Making this choice means asking team members to take more accountability for their team relationships and to use the leader less as an intermediary, arbitrator, or buffer.

The Whole Team Works from the Same Guiding Ideas

With shared accountability for team leadership, the team also needs to share a clearly defined common purpose and set of values. Without these guides, the burden again shifts to the leader to continually monitor and ensure that individual team members are acting in support of the team as a whole.

When the entire team has a shared understanding of and commitment to a common purpose and values, then the purpose and values themselves become guides by which team members can each assess their own performances.⁵ In effect, every team member can lead using the purpose and values as guides. They can also explain to the formal team leader and to other team members how their intent and actions contribute to achieving the purpose in line with the values.

Focusing on these leadership guides isn't a way to avoid important and challenging conversations between the team members and the leader. It's a way to ground—or should I say elevate—interactions so that they don't devolve into conflicts based simply on what someone wants, whoever that someone may be.

When you choose to make purpose and core values central to the team, not only do you increase team members' accountability, you also increase your own. Some leaders find this increased accountability difficult because they feel it narrows their options. Other leaders see it as a way to walk their talk.

Aligning Structures with Your Values

By *structures* I don't mean organizational structures—who reports to whom—but rather the relatively stable recurring events that make up

systems, policies, and procedures (like reward systems, budgeting processes, and performance management policies and processes). An effective team needs team structures that support the team mindset and the desired results. The structures that exist in a team aren't random; they reflect the mindset that consciously or unconsciously prevails in the group. You can consciously design or redesign them to fit the assumptions and values that you want to drive your team's behaviors. If your organization has been led using a unilateral control approach, it's a good bet your team structures will also reflect and reinforce that pattern in ways that undermine attempts to do such things as spread accountability.

The typical 360-degree review provides one of my favorite examples. Does this sound familiar? Your boss and representatives from your peer group, direct reports, and customers complete a survey, rating you on a number of items. Sometimes they add written comments. The completed survey scores are aggregated so that you receive a separate average score on each item from your peers, direct reports, and customers. Because most people have only one boss, you're likely to see that individual score. However, all the other scores and comments are anonymous. That's because those who design 360-degree feedback believe anonymity will lead people to be more honest in their evaluations. Often they also believe that performance feedback is the sole responsibility of the formal leader.

Unfortunately, this system has unintended consequences. First, the anonymity prevents you from learning who gave you the various ratings and what led them to do so. As a result, you have no way to assess the validity of the data. Second, without specific examples, you can't learn exactly what people mean when they rate you with "2" on "provides clear direction" or on "responds to my concerns." Finally, because the feedback is anonymous, you can't easily get help improving your behavior from the people who made the comments. In essence, a system that is supposed to help improve performance is designed in a way that makes it difficult to do so! At a deeper

level, this kind of performance feedback system undermines the idea that team members are accountable to each other.

Our teams are filled with structures, procedures, and systems that were designed from a unilateral control set of values and assumptions that hinder team transparency, accountability, and ultimately effectiveness. If you want an effective team, the team structures need to support different core values and assumptions.

Avoiding What You Can't Share

Many approaches to leadership and teams become less effective as knowledge about them spreads. I heard a great example once on a plane—I was sitting one row in front of a sales executive and one of his managers, whom he had just hired. The executive was giving his new manager a tutorial on how to succeed in the organization. In great detail, he described (loud enough for me to hear every word) how he got others in the organization to do what he wanted. After sharing his methods, the executive said to his new hire, “Of course, I would never use these techniques on you.” Much as I would have loved to see the new hire’s face at that point, I resisted peeking back over the seat.

The executive’s advice to the new hire was self-limiting. As soon as he told someone his strategy for exerting influence, he reduced the chance that his strategy would work on that person. Notice that the executive accurately described his approach by saying that he wouldn’t use it on his manager. Self-limiting strategies are used *on* others. In general, the more people who know the strategy, the less it works.

This is a common problem in teams and organizations. Another favorite example is the sandwich approach to giving negative feedback: slip it between slices of positive feedback at the beginning and end of the conversation. Somewhere in your career, you’ve probably learned this approach. You were probably told that the first positive feedback is designed to relax the person and make it easier for them to hear the negative feedback that follows. The second positive feedback is designed to make the person feel better after hearing the

negative feedback and end on a positive note, so the person won't be angry with you.

But if you've been a knowing recipient—maybe *target* is a better word—of the sandwich approach, you see the sandwich coming as your boss starts to serve it to you. You may quickly discount the positive feedback bread knowing that its purpose is to deliver the meat. You may feel manipulated and annoyed, or just amused that your boss thinks the approach would work on you. In any case, the strategy doesn't work as intended. Yet, amazingly, organizations continue to teach people this approach without realizing that the more they teach it, the less it will work!

If you're going to create an effective team, then the approaches you use have to become stronger—not weaker—as more people use them. That means moving from techniques that you use *on* others to an approach that you use *with* others.

Building Trust Across Relationships

Here's a situation I often pose to my clients so they can discover how they think about sharing information and power. In Table 1.1, the right column is part of a conversation between Paula and Ted. The left column contains Paula's thoughts and feelings. As you read the case, ask yourself two questions:

- What do you think the reporting relationship is between Paula and Ted?
- How should Paula change what she says to Ted if she reports to Ted? If Ted reports to her? If they are peers?

Most leaders quickly recognize that Paula is withholding relevant information that Ted could use to improve his performance in the future. Then they automatically make an inference about the reporting relationship—whether Paula and Ted are peers, whether Paula reports to Ted, or vice versa. About equal numbers of leaders opt for each of the three possible choices. However, when I ask them,

Table 1.1. Looking Behind the Scenes

Paula's Thoughts and Feelings	The Conversation
I thought the presentation was a disaster and so did three others I spoke with.	<i>Paula:</i> How do you think your presentation to the directors went yesterday?
Do you really believe it went OK, or are you just trying to put a good face on it? <i>Nit-picky!</i> You couldn't answer some basic cost questions.	<i>Ted:</i> I think it went OK, although there were some rough spots. Some of the directors can really get nit-picky.
I don't understand why you didn't emphasize why we wanted to do the project. The directors won't approve a project like this if they can't get answers to some basic questions.	<i>Paula:</i> We've got some really important reasons for doing it. Do you think they will OK the project now, or do we need to give them more answers?
I don't want to wait while this project dies on the vine. Besides, my reputation is at stake here too.	<i>Ted:</i> I think we're in OK shape. A couple of them came up to me after the meeting and said they appreciated the presentation. I think we should just wait and see.
I hope the directors don't think I'm responsible for your not having the answers to those questions. Why didn't you use the information I gave you? I've got to get you to understand what you've done.	<i>Paula:</i> Maybe, but I think we might want to give the members some more information.

"How should Paula change what information she shares and with-holds depending on her reporting relationship with Ted?" almost everyone recognizes that, logically, Paula should share all the information regardless of her reporting relationship with him.

Yet emotionally, that's not so easy. Almost everyone's mindset about power and relationships leads to behavior that differs with

peers, subordinates, and superiors. You might be very straightforward when giving feedback to a direct report but beat around the bush when giving similar feedback to your boss. When you act differently across your working relationships others notice and wonder who you really are. At a very basic level people question your integrity.

To get unstuck and get results, you need an approach robust and flexible enough to use in all your work relationships—whether you are working with people who have more power and authority than you, the same amount, or less; whether they are in your group or division or not; and whether they are fellow employees, vendors, or customers.

This doesn't mean you say and do the same thing in every situation; using the same approach means you use the same core values and assumptions to guide what you say and in every situation. Using the same core values and assumptions means you are acting consistently and—if you choose good values and assumptions—developing integrity. People come to know you as the same person, regardless of the situation you're in. In this way you generate trust with others. To create this trust means changing your mindset about power and authority relationships with your team and others.

MINDSET IS KEY TO CHANGING HOW YOU LEAD

At the heart of this book is the idea that how you lead is determined by your core values and assumptions—your mindset: the way of seeing that shapes your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. If you're getting stuck, if you've changed certain ways you *behave* but aren't getting the kinds of results you want, it's because it's simply not enough to change how you behave. Your *mindset* leads to those behaviors and ultimately, those results. If you want to change the results, you need to change the mindset that causes you to behave the way you do.

This means moving beyond techniques. You've probably gotten advice many times to try a new technique to get better results. But

If you want to change the results, you need to change the mindset that causes you to behave the way you do.

this book isn't about simply trying new techniques, and I'm not making a quick-fix promise. If a simple change in technique could get you better results overnight, you'd already be using it. Simply learning new techniques or

changing behavior without changing your mindset is likely to lead to more of the same problems you're encountering now. That's why many leaders become so cynical—often deservedly so—about leadership change efforts. If you have seen more than a few of these efforts come and go, you may view any new effort as the flavor of the month. Whatever enthusiasm you might have for a new approach to improve your leadership and the leadership of your team, it may be tempered by the belief that any change will be short-lived and will soon take its place alongside other efforts that were once touted and now collect dust on bookshelves throughout your organization. With each discarded effort, cynicism grows and sustainable improvement becomes more elusive. That's because efforts that focus only on changing your skill set simply don't have the power to create and sustain stronger results. For this, you and your team also need to change your mindset.

Changing your mindset isn't easy and it doesn't happen overnight. It doesn't happen by sitting through or even actively participating in a two-day seminar or a team off-site, or by just reading a book (including this one—sorry). If you need significant change to create sustainably better results, you need to make significant efforts commensurate with that deep level of change. That means working with your team, over an extended period of time, so that the team mindset takes a new form.

The choice here is between continuing to make changes only in behavior or structure while hoping for significant improvements or

to begin to change your mindset and the mindset of your team that generate the behavior and structures. When you choose the latter, you choose to work on root causes. By understanding your mindset, you'll start to understand why you and your team are getting stuck, how you are unintentionally contributing to staying stuck, and how to get unstuck.

Your Mindset as an Operating System

Here's a useful analogy. Your mindset is like your computer's operating system. Every computer needs one to run. Without an operating system any computer is an expensive paperweight. A computer operating system organizes and controls all the computer's hardware and software so that the computer acts in a flexible but predictable way.

Your mindset does the same thing. You use your mindset to act and get results. Your mindset controls the decisions you make, the statements you make, and the questions you ask. Like any good operating system, your mindset enables you to take action quickly, effortlessly, and skillfully. It does this by using your core values and assumptions to design your behavior. It uses principles such as, "When I am in situation X and Y happens, I should say or do Z." For example, "If I'm in a problem-solving meeting with my direct reports and they are proposing a solution that I think won't work, I should tell them why their idea is flawed."

Like any computer operating system—Windows, for instance, or Linux—your mindset works very quickly so you can assess the situation and make split-second decisions that seem effortless. It's your mindset that enables you to immediately act and react without having to take time to think about it.

Just as you rarely think about your computer's operating system—unless there's a problem—you are also usually unaware of your own mindset. It works in the background so it doesn't distract you from the issues you are trying to resolve. When you're responding to your direct reports about the flaws in their proposed solution, you're not

aware that you may be thinking, *These folks don't really get it. They don't fully understand the challenge here. I need to show them.* You just respond, seemingly without thinking. The fact that mindset operates without conscious awareness is a good thing—until it becomes the cause of problems.

To continue the computer analogy, if your mindset is like an operating system, then your behavior is like application software. Application software helps you accomplish a specific task. Think of the different applications you run on your computer, for example, Microsoft Office, Google Maps, or iTunes. In general such task-oriented programs are designed to be run with the background help of the computer's operating system and cannot run without it. The efficiency here is that the one operating system serves many house-keeping needs that all your applications share.

But this arrangement poses limitations as well, including the fact that the version of operating system you're running affects how well your application software runs. You know this if you've ever tried to run a new program, like a video game, only to discover that your operating system won't support it. If you're trying to run the most current versions of Google Earth, iTunes, or your favorite video game and you're using the current version of your operating system, your application will probably run happily. But try to run a 2012 program on an out-of-date operating system like Windows 95 and you'll be out of luck.

It's the same with people's mindsets and behaviors. Sometimes you want to change your behavior to get better results. You get excited by something you learn or experience, maybe even in a leadership or team development program. You hope you can install the program and run it like new software, and that you and your team will be able to accomplish more, better and faster.

Unfortunately, most of the time it doesn't work. Just as you can't successfully run a new computer application without a compatible operating system, you can't successfully implement a new set of behaviors without also changing the mindset that makes it run.

Organizations are littered with the carcasses of once-touted change efforts that focused on changing only behaviors. Look around your organization—check your bookshelf—and you may see some of these unfortunate remains. The sad part is that those behavior changes you tried to make could have been useful if they'd only had deeper support.

If a new computer application doesn't run well on your old operating system, you can simply upgrade to the latest version. But what if you're trying to implement new leadership behaviors and aren't getting better results? Where and how do you upgrade to the new mindset that the new behaviors require? You need to trade in the unilateral control mindset for one called *mutual learning*.⁶ I introduce them briefly here, and go into more detail in the next two chapters.

The Limiting Mindset: Unilateral Control

When you use a unilateral control mindset, you are trying to achieve your goals by controlling the whole situation. This means trying to get others to do what you want them to do while keeping yourself minimally influenced by others. You view leadership as *power over* others, so it's important to hold on to it. With a unilateral control mindset, you think if you were to share power with others, you'd lose power. And that would be a bad thing.

When you use a unilateral control mindset and you're working with people who see things differently from the way you do, the essence of your mindset is simple: *I understand the situation, you don't; I'm right, you're wrong; I will win.*

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Unilateral control leads to unilateral leadership. Sometimes it's blatant, but often it's subtle. You think of yourself as the sole leader in your team and that makes your team members followers. Consequently, you alone become responsible and accountable for the team's leadership. This means you guide discussion, challenge team members' thinking, and deal with issues that arise in the team and between team members. When members of your team have different points of view, you see yourself as the person who has the information, experience, and expertise to figure out what the team needs to do.

Continuing with the computer analogy, 98 percent of leaders have the unilateral control mindset preinstalled. For almost everyone around the world, it's the default operating system when faced with challenging situations. When the stakes are high, when you feel strongly about the situation or solution, or when others have very different views from yours—chances are you automatically run on this mindset.

The Transforming Mindset: Mutual Learning

When you use a mutual learning mindset, you achieve your goals by learning from and with others. This means you're open to being influenced by others at the same time you seek to influence others. You see each member of your team having a piece of the puzzle. Your job, along with the other team members, is to jointly put the puzzle together. You view leadership as power *with others*, not *over others*, so you look for ways of sharing it. With a mutual learning mindset, power is not zero-sum. If you share power with others, you don't lose any yourself.

When you operate from the mutual learning mindset and you're working with people who see things differently from the way you do, the essence of your mindset is simple: *I understand some things. So do you. Let's learn and move forward together.*

Mutual learning supports shared leadership. This doesn't mean that you give up your role as the formal leader of the team. And it

doesn't mean that the team starts making all decisions by consensus. It does mean each team member is responsible for helping lead the team—taking initiative and sharing accountability for the team's functioning and results. It means that at any time, any leader on the team can express a key idea, take the lead in guiding discussion, challenge other team members' thinking, or help the team move

forward in other ways. When members of your team have different points of view, everyone on the team becomes curious about what information each of you has to support your different views and what each of you might be missing.

When you operate from the mutual learning mindset and you're working with people who see things differently from the way you do, the essence of your mindset is simple:

I understand some things.

So do you. Let's learn and move forward together.

MIND THE GAP

It's easy to think you're using a mutual learning mindset when you're really using a unilateral control mindset. Mutual learning is often what forward-thinking leaders and organizations espouse and their fond beliefs are often touted in the press. Read the *New York Times* Sunday business column "Corner Office," which interviews CEOs each week about their leadership approach. Most of the CEOs describe how they create a safe environment for people to take risks and build trust, an environment in which people can be curious and learn from each other at the same time they create teams that are accountable. How congruent are these CEOs' behaviors with the mutual-sounding leadership approach they espouse? My hunch is not as much as they think. In my decades of working with leaders, observing thousands of behaviors, I've found that nearly

all leaders who espouse mutual learning seem in fact to be operating from a unilateral control mindset. As a result, they undermine the very results they are trying to create.

Creating an effective leadership team starts with making some fundamental choices about how you want to lead. These choices reflect your basic values and assumptions about what it means to be a leader and what it means to be a team. I frame them as choices between a traditional but self-limiting approach to leadership and a relatively new, more systemic and sustainable approach to leadership. Creating this new approach to leadership and teams requires making a series of decisions. You may not have thought about your power of choice or, if you did, you may have assumed that the traditional approach was the only option. But you do have options, and the choices you can make about these leadership issues can benefit everything your team does. Ultimately, your choices govern the results your team can achieve. You can uncover and change your own mindset and that of your team—making yourself a smarter leader with an even smarter team.