Paradoxical Leadership:

Mastering Balanced Versatility for Improved Relationships & Performance!

Rather than opposing paths, the true path to success is... mastering the Paradox!
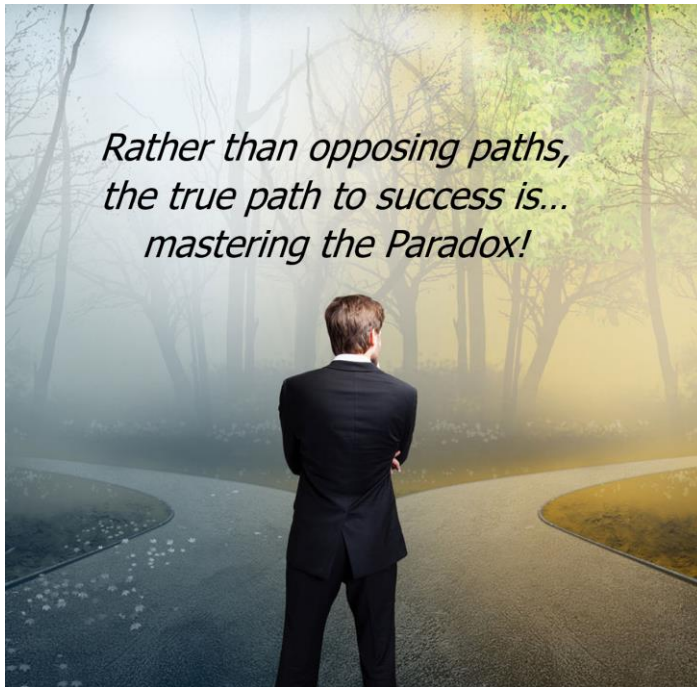
"The predictive and prescriptive value of Harrison Assessments' analytics system pays increasing dividends through progressive implementation across the talent cycle that is simply transformative."

-- Bonita Lockings,
Senior Vice President, Greater Houston Partnership

Overview of Paradoxical Leadership: Paradoxical Leadership is a concept that is well-documented in organizational literature, designed to support leaders facing competing priorities, diverse perspectives, and constrained resources. Many paradoxes are driven by leaders' behavioral choices. The challenge is to consider both paradoxical perspectives rather than using an either/or solution; for example, Frankness *and* Diplomacy. This article explores several common cases of both individual leader and team situations in which Paradoxical imbalances result in dysfunction and hindered performance, engagement, and business results.

Measuring Leadership Paradoxes: Harrison Assessments is the only assessment that offers Paradox technology to measure *seemingly contradictory* behaviors that are actually *complementary*. This proprietary assessment capability is able to measure imbalances that contribute to derailing behaviors, as well as stress behaviors. Harrison Assessments is used in both personal and professional/executive coaching in addition to a wide range of solutions across the talent cycle.
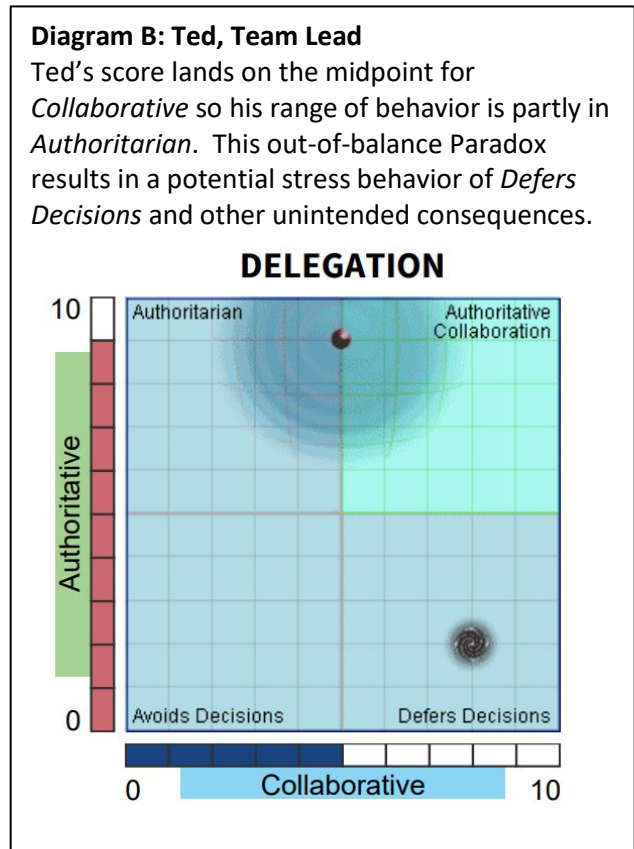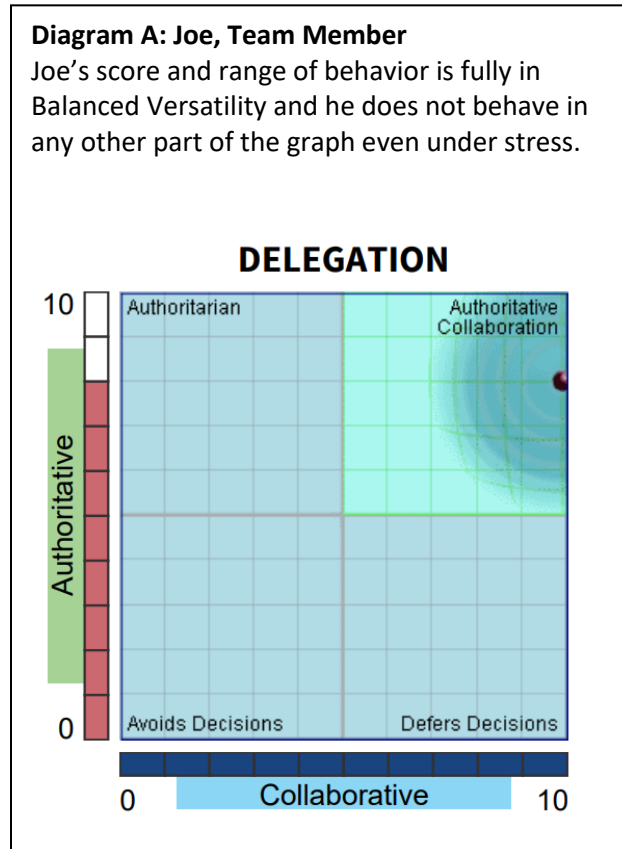
 A Familiar Team Scenario

Joe was frustrated that his team did not collaborate more before making important decisions regarding their team projects. His boss Ted who was the team leader usually made important decisions independently with the justification that time did not allow for consensus. Joe had approached him about some of the problems that often would arise later, undermining the team's performance and ability to meet deadlines but his observations went unheeded. Other team members saw the problems as well, but tended to focus on their delegated responsibilities without concern for how they may

impact other team members. To Joe the situation had become dysfunctional and he was considering a job change.

Is this a familiar scenario in your team or organization? The good news is that there is a solution! With the unique Paradox technology of Harrison Assessments, the relationship between decision making and collaborative behaviors can be measured for individual leaders and their teams. Through the realization of one's preferences in each trait, the impact those preferences have on delegation and hence individual and team performance, as well as the unintended consequences of an out-of-balance profile, leaders and their teams can adjust their behaviors for improved relationships, performance, engagement and retention.

Delegation Paradox Analysis

Let's take a close look at Joe's boss' profile compared to Joe's; in Diagram A, Joe demonstrates a preference for both traits in the Paradox with his score and range of behavior in *Authoritative Collaboration,* the ideal part of the Paradox called *Balanced Versatility*. In Diagram B of his boss, Ted's profile shows an out-of-balance profile in which he prefers to make the decisions and only moderately prefers to collaborate, placing his score and range of behavior partly in *Authoritarian*. In addition, under stress after doubling down on making decisions, when significant problems arise, Ted can "flip" to the behavior of *Defers Decisions*. With these out-of-balance preferences, Ted experiences the *unintended consequences* of a dysfunctional team, and at times unwanted turn over; further more under stress a tough team situation can be exacerbated with project delays, missed deadlines and the consequential increase in expenses or missed revenue opportunities.

Diagram A: Joe, Team Member	Diagram B: Ted, Team Lead
Joe's score and range of behavior is fully in Balanced Versatility and he does not behave in any other part of the graph even under stress.	Ted's score lands on the midpoint for *Collaborative* so his range of behavior is partly in *Authoritarian*. This out-of-balance Paradox results in a potential stress behavior of *Defers Decisions* and other unintended consequences.

DELEGATION — Diagram A: Joe, Team Member

DELEGATION — Diagram B: Ted, Team Lead

An Uncommon Solution to Improve Leader & Team Performance

Because of the delays and missed deadlines, Ted was approached by his boss, the project management VP, who suggested that Ted work with an internal coach to improve his delegation. Given the new insights Ted gained through his Paradox and other Harrison behavioral reports, Ted learned that he could improve his own performance and that of the team by developing his *Collaborative* preference; as he implemented a new approach to collaborating with his team, not only did the unintended consequences his team previously faced diminish, but Ted also became less stressed when project challenges arose, which minimized his "flip" behavior of

> *The reality is that engagement and retention across an entire organization depends on the engagement of leaders and the organization's commitment to accountability!*
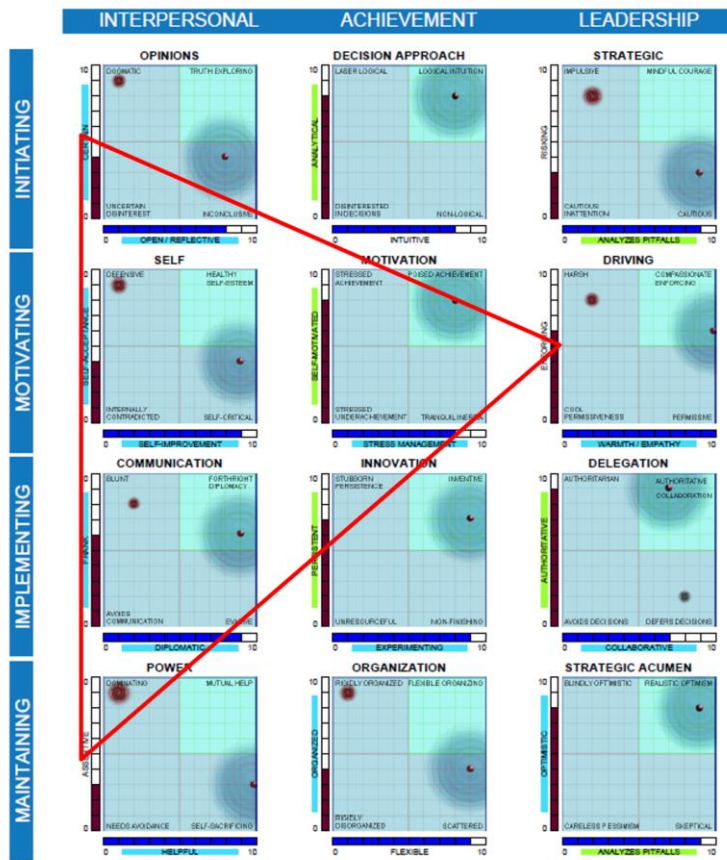
Deferred Decisions! Decisions improved as Ted sought team input in important decisions. Even though there was not always consensus, the more deliberate approach along with input from experts on his team helped Ted make better decisions with fewer project delays. The silver lining was that Joe, a valued team member, was more engaged than ever which led to consideration for promotion. The entire team was more positively engaged to the delight of the VP as well as Ted!

Paradoxical Leadership & the "Bermuda Triangle of Accountability"

This case study is just one example of the many benefits of the Paradox concept in leadership and team performance. Harrison Assessments measures 12 Paradoxical trait pairs and through effective debriefing on one's profile, patterns among the Paradoxes reveal opportunities for relationship and performance improvement within the context of the role and team situation, as well as cultural considerations.

Sample Paradox Summary Executive Report

Red Bermuda Triangle identifies the accountability Paradoxes. Scores are represented by the red dot and cirular shadow for normal range of behavior. *Balanced Versatility* is the upper right part of each graph. *Stress behaviors* are represented by the small "hurricanes" opposite the stronger preferred behaviors in each out-of-balance Paradox.

Bermuda Triangle Paradoxes

INTERPERSONAL	ACHIEVEMENT	LEADERSHIP
OPINIONS — DOGMATIC / TRUTH EXPLORING; UNCERTAIN DISINTEREST / INCONCLUSIVE; OPEN / REFLECTIVE (INITIATING)	**DECISION APPROACH** — LASER LOGICAL / LOGICAL INTUITION; DISINTERESTED INDECISIVE / NONLOGICAL; INTUITIVE (ANALYTICAL)	**STRATEGIC** — IMPULSIVE / MINDFUL COURAGE; CAUTIOUS INATTENTION / CAUTIOUS; ANALYZES PITFALLS (RISKING)
SELF — DEFENSIVE / HEALTHY SELF-ESTEEM; INTERNALLY CONTRADICTED / SELF-CRITICAL; SELF-IMPROVEMENT (MOTIVATING)	**MOTIVATION** — STRESSED ACHIEVEMENT / POISED ACHIEVEMENT; STRESSED UNDERACHIEVEMENT / TRANQUILINERS; STRESS MANAGEMENT (SELF MOTIVATED)	**DRIVING** — HARSH / COMPASSIONATE ENFORCING; COOL PERMISSIVENESS / PERMISSIVE; WARMTH / EMPATHY (ENFORCING)
COMMUNICATION — BLUNT / FORTHRIGHT DIPLOMACY; AVOIDS COMMUNICATION / EVASIVE; DIPLOMATIC (IMPLEMENTING)	**INNOVATION** — STUBBORN PERSISTENCE / INVENTIVE; UNRESOURCEFUL / NON-FINISHING; EXPERIMENTING (PERSISTENT)	**DELEGATION** — AUTHORITARIAN / AUTHORITATIVE COLLABORATION; AVOIDS DECISIONS / DEFERS DECISIONS; COLLABORATIVE (AUTHORITATIVE)
POWER — DOMINATING / MUTUAL HELP; NEEDS AVOIDANCE / SELF-SACRIFICING; HELPFUL (MAINTAINING)	**ORGANIZATION** — RIGIDLY ORGANIZED / FLEXIBLE ORGANIZING; RIGIDLY DISORGANIZED / SCATTERED; FLEXIBLE (ORGANIZED)	**STRATEGIC ACUMEN** — BLINDLY OPTIMISTIC / REALISTIC OPTIMISM; CARELESS PESSIMISM / SKEPTICAL; ANALYZES PITFALLS (OPTIMISTIC)

One of the most prevalent patterns that impact leadership and team performance is the *Bermuda Triangle of Accountability* that measures three key Paradoxical relationships:

- ➢ **Driving** *(Enforcing & Warmth/Empathy)*
- ➢ **Power** *(Assertive of one's own needs/Helpful)*
- ➢ **Opinions** *(Certain/ Open-reflective)*

Added to these three Paradoxes that form the *Bermuda Triangle*, in which "work can be lost" due to lack of accountability, is the Paradox of **Communication** *(Frank/Diplomatic)*.

When one or more of these Paradoxes is out of balance, the leader will likely struggle with holding others accountable. In the sample Paradox Summary Report, the three key Paradoxes are identified with a red triangle and reflect the opportunity for development in each of the out-of-balance Paradoxes; in addition, the *Communication Paradox* exacerbates the imbalances in the other Paradoxes undermining the leader's ability to hold people accountable.

Ineffective Performance Management

In Diagram C we see another example of the *Bermuda Triangle* Paradoxes isolated with an explanation of how the profile pattern impacts a leader's performance management approach. Once again, the *Driving, Power* and *Opinions Paradoxes* are out of balance, indicating development opportunity for the leader's and team's performance. The good news is that when leaders see how their preferences impact their own and others' success, they are more receptive to change and development. Depending on which Paradoxes are most imbalanced and the team situation, the leader with his coach can identify a development strategy that will improve clarity of the leader's expectations and enable them to enforce those expectations in more effective ways.

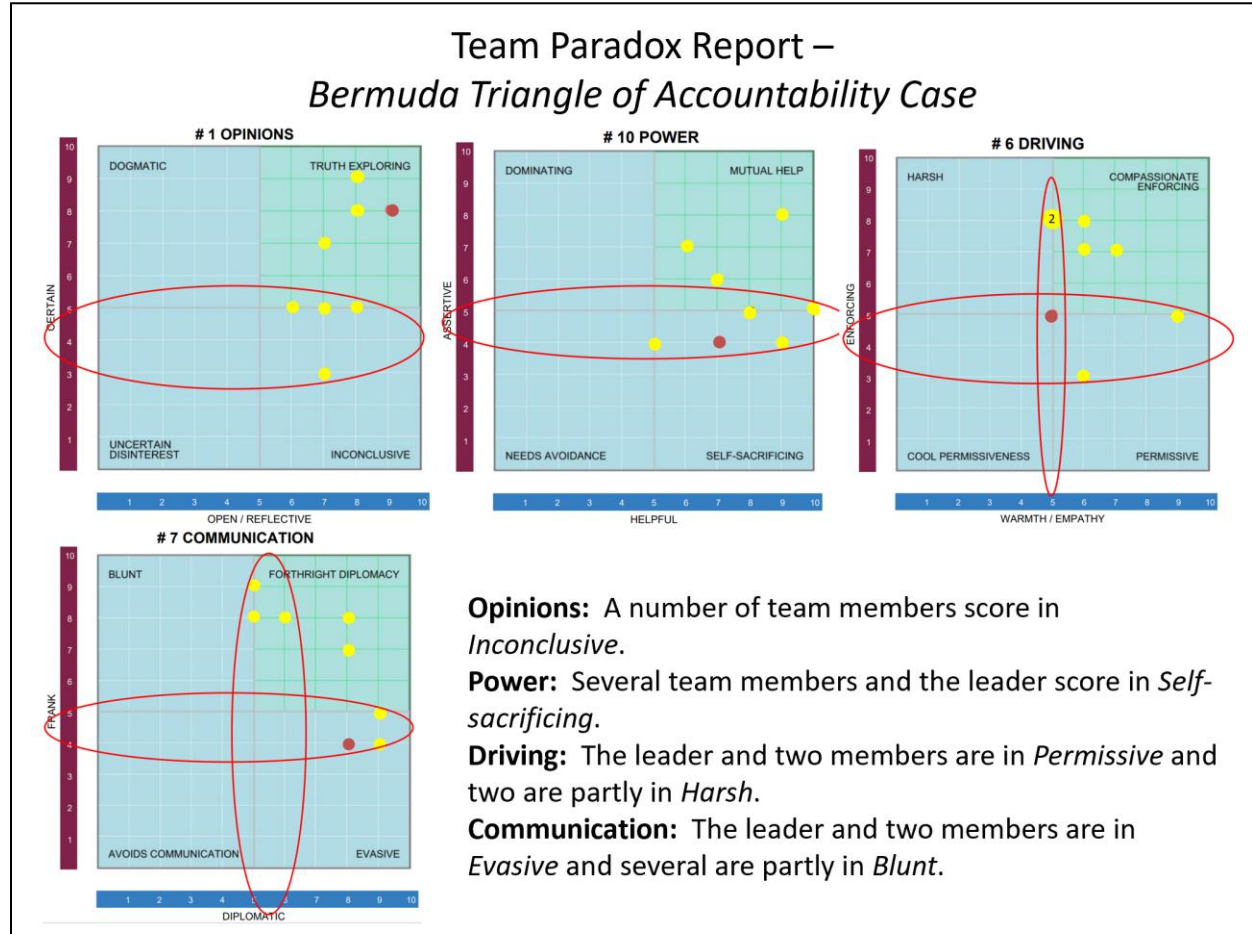**Diagram C: Bermuda Triangle of Accountability Explanation**
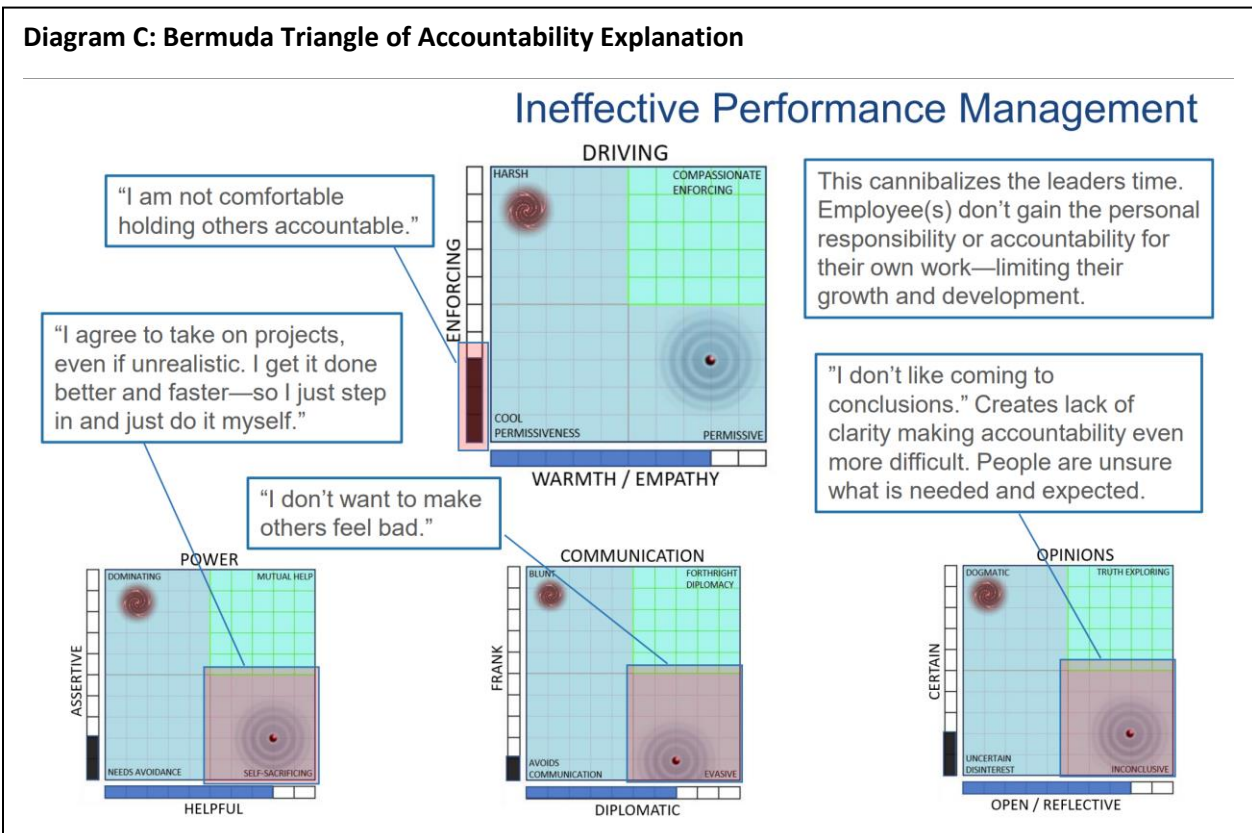
In the two examples above, as the leaders improved toward *Balanced Versatility* in the accountability Paradoxes, they noticed significant improvement in their own performance management and in their teams' achievement of team and organizational goals. The reality is that engagement and retention across an entire organization depends on the engagement of leaders and the organization's commitment to accountability! Harrison Assessments provides a full range of solutions beyond Paradox to facilitate attainment of talent and business results.

A Next Step In Development – The Team Paradox Report

As a next step in development, a team leader can involve their entire team in experiencing Harrison Assessments report and debrief. Once each team member has reviewed their personal report and potential development opportunities with a certified debriefer, a team report can be generated and a custom *Paradoxical Leadership* Workshop planned. The value of the team self-discovery workshop is

exceptional, facilitating team trust, insight regarding strengths and areas of improvement, and increased engagement for team performance improvement.

In an actual team report example presented below, the team had a *Bermuda Triangle* profile with a number of opportunities for development as outlined in the case diagram.

Team Paradox Report – Bermuda Triangle of Accountability Case

Opinions: A number of team members score in *Inconclusive*.

Power: Several team members and the leader score in *Self-sacrificing*.

Driving: The leader and two members are in *Permissive* and two are partly in *Harsh*.

Communication: The leader and two members are in *Evasive* and several are partly in *Blunt*.

After the self-discovery team session, the team members developed a plan of action with support of the team leader and facilitator which included:

1) **OPINIONS:** *Truth Exploring* Team Members allow *Less Certain* Members to share opinions/concerns first
2) **POWER:** More *Assertive of Own Needs* Members help identify team's accountabilities to accomplish team goals
3) **DRIVING:** Team Leader needs to step forward to establish team "rules" to ensure all members are held accountable for their individual contributions to the team.
Less *warm/empathetic* members including Leader consider whether all team member personal concerns are given fair consideration.

4) **COMMUNICATION:** All team members consider the communication styles of other team members; High *Frank* seek to be diplomatic when appropriate; Low *Frank* seek to communicate more forthrightly to ensure their voices are heard. Consider that under stress, high *Frank* members may be *Evasive* or "check out" and high *Diplomatic* may become *Blunt*!
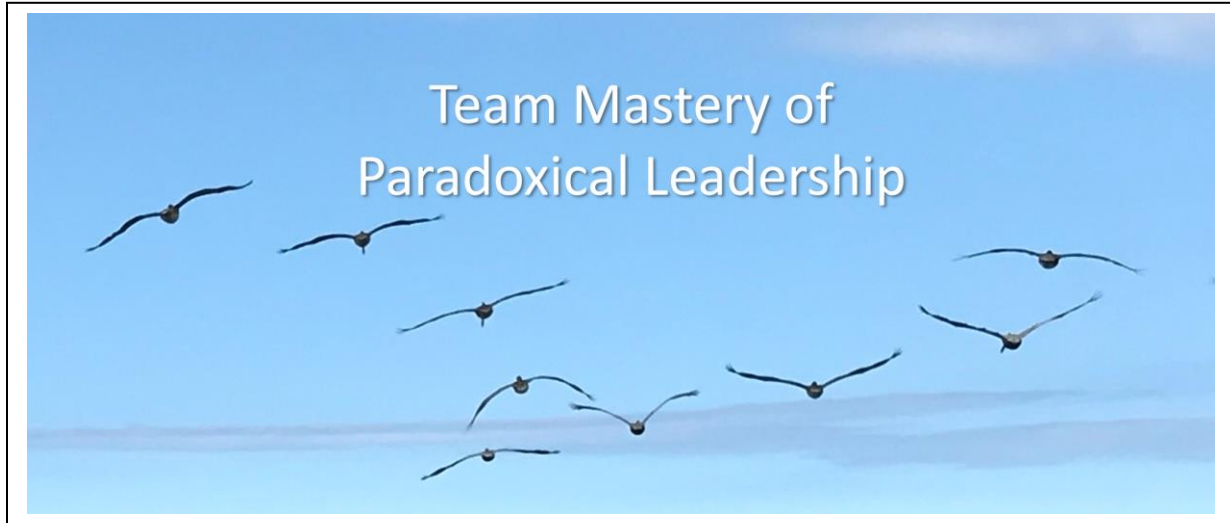
The Team Paradox Process Results

With increased awareness of team member preferences and a process to improve team dynamics, the leader and team were able together to improve their accountability of each other, as well as that of their own departmental teams. The benefits of the individual and team assessment and development process was dramatic and lasting.

One CEO shared about the Team Paradoxical Leadership process, *"Harrison Assessments and the unique Paradox report was instrumental in exploration of personal and team blind spots that impacted my leadership effectiveness and the success of my team. In my experience, it is difficult to know how leader behavioral preferences impact the organization and results; add team dynamics to the mix and relationship complexities can derail progress, cause team dysfunction and even undermine culture. The Paradox debrief process for team members and the self-discovery team session not only revealed blind spots, but stress behaviors and the unintended consequences of out-of-balance Paradoxes. The transparency of the team and accuracy of the data helped create understanding, empathy and greater insight into our potential through personal and team development goals. When a team embraces Harrison Assessments' Paradoxical Leadership process from the top down, the results are exceptionally rewarding and contribute to a high performing team."* –Mark Montgomery, CEO Radical Certitude, 35-year banking professional

Team Paradox Process

1) Team Members Experience Individual Paradox Debrief

2) Team Leader Reviews Team Members' Reports
   & Team Report

3) Team Event:
   a) Review Team Paradoxes for…
   ✓ Strengths
   ✓ Areas for Improvement
   ✓ Blind Spots

   b) Team Self-Discovers Unintended Consequences

   c) Develops a Team Plan & Schedules Follow up

The Tip of the Leadership Development Iceberg

Since accountability is crucial to the success of each team member, as well as the ability for leaders to develop their direct reports, this pattern is extremely valuable to leaders and their teams in understanding opportunities for development. In the case of extreme imbalances, working with a coach to target Paradoxes with the greatest opportunity for improvement also can facilitate improvement in other related out-of-balance Paradoxes. The depth of insight gained often depends on the context of the leader's situation and organizational culture; the Paradox report debrief is extremely valuable to understand and probe these vital organizational factors.

These example cases are really just the tip of the iceberg in terms of identifying opportunity for leadership development and performance improvement through mastery of the Paradox and achieving Balanced Versatility. In addition to the Paradox report, Harrison Assessments provides a Main Graph report facilitating a deeper dive into the Paradoxical relationships related to other supplemental trait behaviors that impact leadership and team success.

Beyond Paradox… Harrison Assessments' Leading-Edge Talent Solutions

Furthermore, Harrison Assessments offers a host of other reports that facilitate solutions across the talent cycle for hiring, succession and career planning, engagement and retention, coaching/mentoring, among other valuable applications. Bonita Lockings, Senior Vice President Administration for the Greater Houston Partnership shared, *"Having implemented Harrison Assessments in leadership and career development, our organization has experienced many benefits from the accuracy and comprehensiveness of its various solutions for individual leaders, employees, as well as our teams. It is difficult to capture in a brief statement how Paradox and many other reports impact behavioral, relational, competency, performance, team, cultural, and leadership insights! The predictive and prescriptive value of Harrison's analytics system pays increasing dividends through progressive implementation across the talent cycle that is simply transformative."*

Whatever your organization's talent, leadership, and team challenges, Harrison Assessments behavioral system has predictive and prescriptive reports and solutions to enable more effective interventions and results.

By Sheryl Dawson
CEO, Dawson Consulting Group
A Harrison Assessments Solutions Partner

For more insight into this vital pattern, see the Harrison Assessments white paper *The Leadership Bermuda Triangle: Self Defeating Behaviors that Kill Good Work*.

Learn more on the custom *Paradoxical Leadership Team Workshop*.

To learn more about *Paradoxical Leadership*, participate in the *Paradoxical Leadership Webinar* .