Teams Under Pressure:

How to Tell Whether Your People Are Equal to Difficult Times

CTG Consulting

Welcome!

The difficult economic climate is placing teams under enormous performance pressure, making adaptability a key competency. This whitepaper shows leaders how to recognise the true capability of their teams during demanding phases.

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Budgets are tight, hiring is being postponed, investments are put on hold: what once counted as a temporary crisis now feels more like a new normal. This difficult economic situation does not pass without consequences, neither for organisations nor for their people. Performance pressure is rising noticeably, while complexity and expectations grow at the same time. Processes become more demanding, decision-making windows narrower, coordination denser. Efficiency becomes a baseline requirement, adaptability a key competency. Yet while markets and conditions change rapidly, internal change often cannot keep pace.

This creates friction. Teams come under strain; routines no longer work as they used to. What has worked so far is suddenly put to the test. And yet this is precisely where an opportunity lies. Because tense phases reveal, without mercy, how resilient collaboration truly is, how clearly roles are distributed, and how robust motivation and a sense of responsibility remain.

In this whitepaper we turn to questions that occupy many leaders right now: How do I know whether I have the right people and teams for this phase? And what, specifically, can I do when doubts arise?

What does a “functioning” team look like?

When people talk about functioning teams, many first think of harmony: smooth processes, a friendly atmosphere and few conflicts. In practice, however, this is not a reliable indicator. Truly high-performing teams are not recognised in calm times, but under pressure.

What matters is how a team behaves when priorities collide, resources become scarce or uncertainty arises. Functioning teams remain capable of acting in these moments. They do not lose their bearings, even when decisions become uncomfortable.

At its core, it is about balance. Technical expertise alone is not enough, and neither is pure motivation. Only the interplay of hard skills, soft skills and inner attitude makes sustainable performance possible.

The core characteristics of high-performing teams

Clarity
about the shared purpose

Teams that are aware of their shared goals and of the contribution they make respond far more resiliently under pressure.

Who decides on what? How is performance measured? Where does responsibility begin and end?

Transparency
about roles and expectations

“The shared purpose acts like an inner compass, especially when external orientation is missing.”

Alicia Buss, Managing Director CareerTeam

Shared
values

These show, for example, in taking responsibility when things get difficult. It is precisely under pressure that it becomes clear whether values are lived or merely communicated.

Recognising the right people:

5 clear signs

Teams are only as strong as their members. Especially in challenging times, certain behavioural patterns can be observed that point to a good fit.

Ownership

A first sign is proactivity, even beyond one's own role. The right people do not think only in terms of areas of responsibility. They bring the motivation to do whatever the team needs at that moment.

Alertness

Second, they have a functioning early-warning system and the communication skills to match. Risks, tensions or conflicts are addressed early so that they do not escalate.

Openness to criticism

A third characteristic is constructive conflict capability. Differing opinions are expressed without damaging relationships. Tension is tolerated rather than avoided, which keeps the focus on what matters.

Flexibility

Fourth, team fit shows in adaptability combined with focus. Priorities can be reordered without losing sight of the overarching goal. Here, flexibility does not lead to arbitrariness, but to clarity.

Self-reflection

People who reflect on themselves regularly are aware of the impact of their behaviour. They question their expectations and adjust their actions when these are no longer effective. Self-reflection also provides orientation in situations where roles, responsibilities or expectations are not entirely clear.

Taking warning signs seriously:

Indicators of poor fit

At the individual level

- weak performance against KPIs
- low motivation or a lack of engagement
- insufficient adaptability
- conflicts, duplicated work, avoidance of collaboration
- high support effort and/or a need for de-escalation

At the team level

- declining willingness to engage in dialogue, unspoken problems
- slow or postponed decisions
- increasing complaints from stakeholders
- reactive rather than proactive behaviour
- unclear, inconsistent decisions → a sign of being overwhelmed or of fit problems

Assessing team fit and potential:

Observe, understand, act

We now know how to recognise strong teams and which signals point to a poor fit. But observation alone is not enough. Anyone who wants to make reliable decisions over the long term needs a systematic approach. Only then does it become visible whether the right people are in the right places, or whether adjustments are needed in the longer term.

At the individual level, you start with clearly defined requirement profiles, competency mapping and KPIs. The point is to measure not only work results, but observable behaviour. Who proactively takes responsibility? Who spots problems before they escalate? Who can tolerate conflict and drive solutions forward? One-on-one conversations, structured feedback rounds, 360° analyses or simulations of stressful situations make exactly these behavioural patterns visible.

At the team level, the focus shifts from the individual to the interplay. How does the team work under pressure? How does it respond to external impulses? Where does friction arise, where does energy flow? Process metrics, correction loops, stakeholder feedback or complaint rates provide concrete clues.

Systematic assessment turns gut feeling and loose impressions into analysable insights. From these well-founded insights into team dynamics and individual potential, strategically sound decisions can be made.

Acting on deficits:

a structured and consistent approach

Analysing the status quo

First, the status quo of skills, capacity and motivation needs to be analysed.

In the root-cause analysis that follows, it is important to distinguish whether the shortfall lies in knowledge, routine, fit or engagement, or whether the issue is, perhaps, overload.

Root-cause analysis

Prioritisation

This is followed by prioritisation. What must be addressed immediately? What will take effect in the medium or long term?

Measures

according to the cause

Skill deficits

training, coaching or job rotation

Capacity or process problems

optimisation, restructuring or automation

Leadership and culture deficits

the need for clear KPIs, ownership and consequences

Regular review through one-on-one conversations, KPI reviews and feedback loops ensures the sustainability of the changes. If a clear case of poor fit persists despite several interventions, personnel decisions are also part of responsible leadership.

Good teams do not emerge from gut feeling, but from clarity. Difficult phases reveal not only who performs, but why performance arises, or fails to. Making precisely this “why” tangible opens up room for development.

Right now, the fit of employees is more decisive than ever. Those who look systematically, clarify expectations and develop people deliberately create alternatives to drastic measures, and at the same time strengthen the future viability of their organisation.

Drawing on support:

Our services

External guidance can help to recognise patterns and implement change effectively. We are glad to support you in the following areas:

- **Team diagnostics and performance analyses**
- **Role and competency architectures**
- **Performance and goal systems for teams**
- **Leadership coaching during demanding phases**
- **Team-reset workshops for realignment**
- **Selection and decision advisory for personnel questions**
- **Implementation of feedback and development formats**
- **Guidance through change and transformation processes**

CTG Consulting

Let's talk about your challenges!

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