

STRONG TEAMS DON'T JUST HAPPEN

Creating Stable Teams Inside
Complex Systems

WHY TEAM BUILDING MATTERS IN AUDIT WORK





**Think about the best audit
team you've worked on.**

What made it effective?

DYNAMICS TO CONSIDER

Audit teams are often assembled quickly under pressure:

- Different personalities
- Different experience levels
- Tight timelines
- High-stakes outcomes

Yet teams are expected to:

- Build trust immediately
- Coordinate effectively
- Handle conflict professionally
- Produce high-quality work

Strong teams are not accidental –
they are intentionally built.

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**TEAMS OPERATE INSIDE
SYSTEMS**



AUDIT TEAMS
DO NOT
WORK IN
ISOLATION

- ▶ They operate inside complex systems:
 - ▶ Organizational systems
 - ▶ Reporting systems
 - ▶ Communication systems
 - ▶ Relationship systems

AUDIT TEAM WITHIN A SYSTEM

Strong at the Center. Connected on Every Level.



If the center is **unstable**:

- Miscommunication spreads
- Friction increases
- Stakeholder relationships deteriorate
- Quality and timelines suffer

If the center is **strong**:

- Pressure is absorbed better
- Decisions improve
- People adapt faster
- External relationships improve

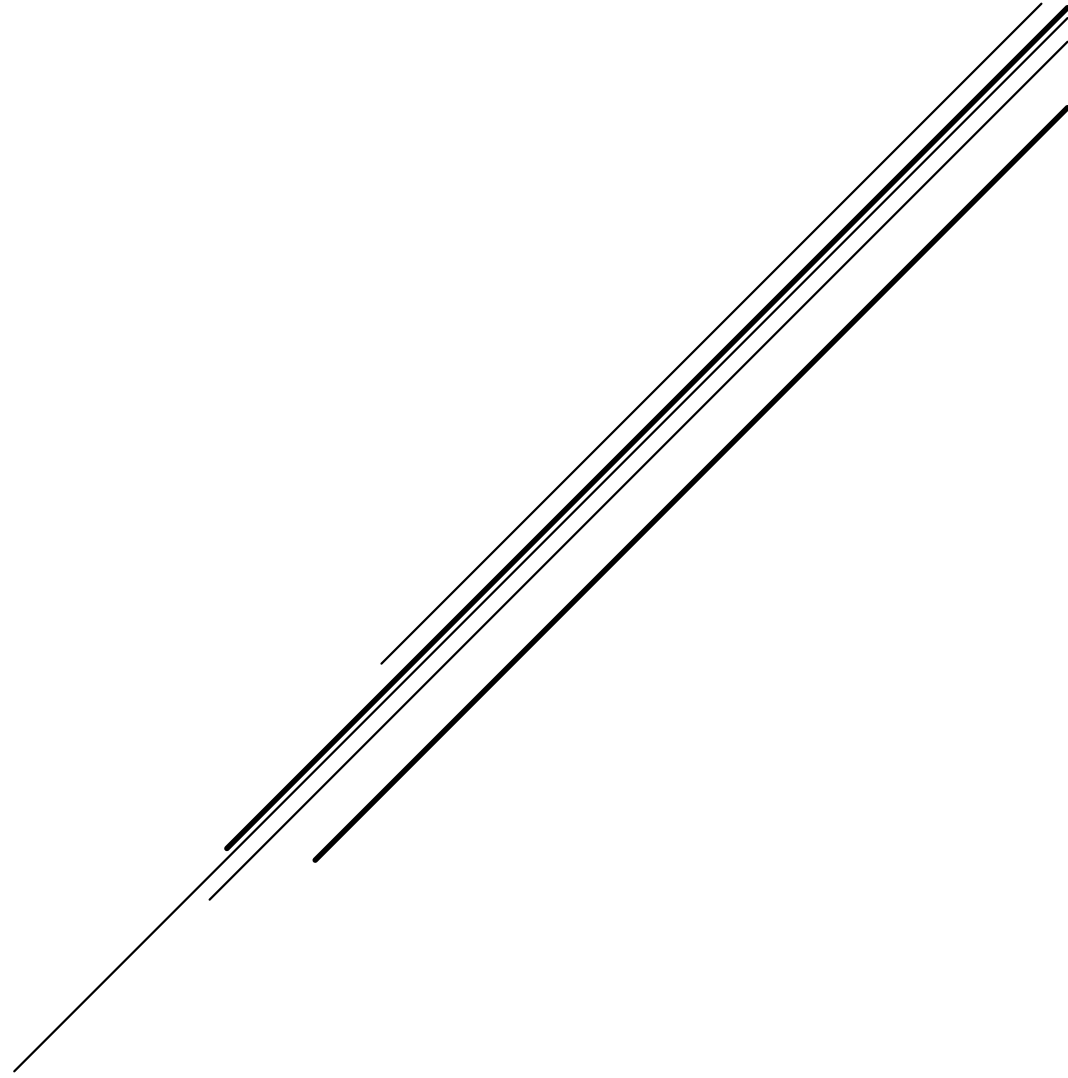




What most often disrupts team effectiveness?

- Unclear roles
- Communication gaps
- Personality conflict
- Changing priorities
- Lack of trust

BUILDING TRUST INTENTIONALLY



COMPONENTS OF TRUST ON AUDIT TEAMS

▶ **Reliability**

- ▶ Follow through
- ▶ Meet deadlines
- ▶ Communicate early when issues arise

▶ **Respect**

- ▶ Value different expertise
- ▶ Include quieter voices
- ▶ Avoid dismissing concerns

▶ **Transparency**

- ▶ Raise risks early
- ▶ Admit uncertainty
- ▶ Share context

▶ **Support**

- ▶ Help teammates succeed
- ▶ Avoid creating unnecessary pressure
- ▶ Share information proactively

TIMELINE OF BUILDING A TEAM: WEEK 1

Discuss

- Roles and responsibilities
- Communication expectations
- Meeting cadence
- Preferred work styles
- Escalation paths
- Decision-making approach

KICK OFF TEAM BUILDING

Roles and responsibilities

- Discuss who and how to manage work.
- For example, if your work is divided by key objectives,
 - will each person own one from start to finish? What does “owning” it mean?
 - What type of check-ins and updates are expected?
 - What does accountability look like?
 - When someone gets stuck, who can they turn to?


KICK OFF TEAM BUILDING

Communication expectations

- How do you prefer feedback?
 - Direct “just tell me what needs fixing”?
 - More diplomatic that includes context and relationship building before feedback?
- Do you prefer time to think and process information before responding?
- Would you prefer to work out issues verbally or through email?

KICK OFF TEAM BUILDING

Meeting cadence

- Daily stand ups?
 - Weekly team meeting with manager?
 - Regular check in with senior leaders?
 - Weekly or bi-weekly 1:1s?
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KICK OFF TEAM BUILDING

Preferred work styles

- **What do you need to show up as your best?**
 - Are you risk-averse or risk tolerant?
 - Are you comfortable making decisions with incomplete information or do you need more analysis?
 - Are you big-picture or details?
 - Are you deadline driven?
 - Do you get energy from others? Or do you do your best work independently?
 - Does an agenda help you in meetings?

KICK OFF TEAM BUILDING

Escalation paths

- **Who needs to know what and when?**
 - What issues should be escalated immediately?
 - What does “no surprises” mean to this team?
 - Who needs to know about risks and when?
 - How will we raise concerns respectfully?
 - How will we handle disagreements?
 - What should someone do if they feel overwhelmed?
 - How will we address team conflict if it occurs?

KICK OFF TEAM BUILDING

Decision-making approach

- **What process to follow for key decisions?**
 - What decisions belong to the team?
 - What decisions belong to leadership?
 - How much input do we want before deciding?
 - What does consensus mean for us?
 - How will we handle disagreements?
 - When will we revisit decisions?
 - How will we make decisions under pressure?

TIMELINE OF BUILDING A TEAM: THROUGHOUT THE WORK

BUILD TRUST THROUGH CONSISTENCY & SHARED UNDERSTANDING

Where

- Team check-ins: add 5 minutes to a standing meeting
- 1:1 check-ins
- Informal conversations before meetings

Discuss

- What's going well?
- What feels unclear?
- Where are we stuck?
- Who needs support?

TIMELINE OF BUILDING A TEAM: MID-PROJECT/HIGH-PRESSURE PHASE

PROTECT TEAM STABILITY DURING STRESS

Common risk periods

- Tight deadlines
- Scope changes
- Difficulties with stakeholders
- Heavy review periods
- Staffing changes

Pressure does not create culture — it reveals it.

Discuss

- Are we following the approach we agreed upon at the beginning?
- What tension are we avoiding?
- What support is needed right now?

Address conflict early

- Avoid:
 - side conversations
 - silent frustration
 - assumptions about intent

Focus on the issue, not the person.

TIMELINE OF BUILDING A TEAM: KEY TRANSITION POINTS

Important Moments

- onboarding new team members
- transition from planning to fieldwork
- draft report phase
- leadership changes
- expanded scope

Teams often lose effectiveness during transitions, not during routine work.

Discuss

- Take 10–15 minutes to reset:
 - priorities
 - roles
 - communication
 - workload
 - stakeholder strategy

TIMELINE OF BUILDING A TEAM: PROJECT CLOSEOUT

Important practice

- Recognize contributions, especially as they relate to maintaining the culture on your team
 - technical expertise
 - collaboration
 - adaptability
 - leadership under pressure
 - support of others

Teams improve faster when reflection is built into the process, not treated as optional.

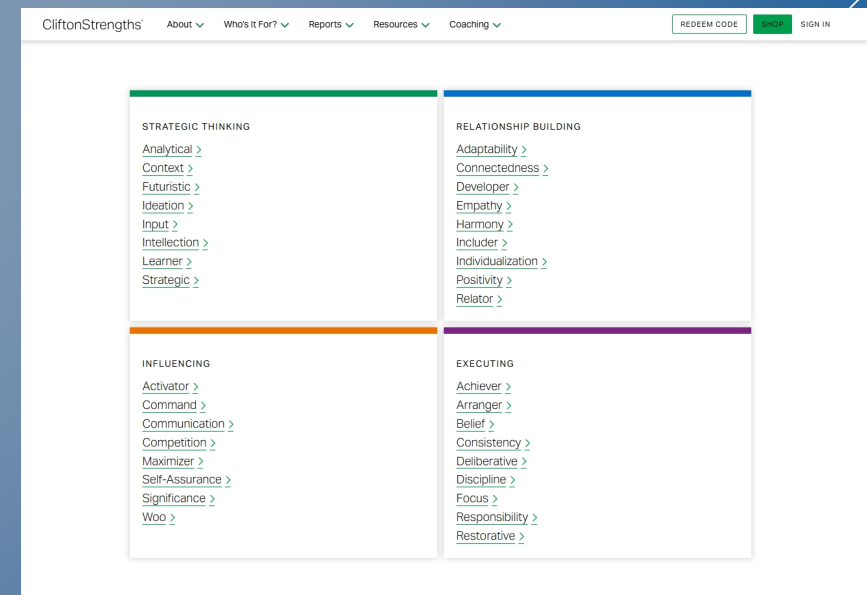
Discuss

- What helped this team work well?
- Where did we struggle?
- What should we repeat?
- What should we change next time?
- What strengthened trust?
- What weakened trust?

UNDERSTANDING ONE ANOTHER: A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH

▶ Strong teams take time to understand:

- ▶ What people naturally do well
- ▶ What energizes them
- ▶ What support they need
- ▶ How they contribute best



DISCOVER YOUR TEAM'S TALENTS

A strong team is not made of identical people.

It is made of people who understand how to work together intentionally.

CliftonStrengths (Gallup tool)

- If you have access to this tool, you can use the assessment results to ask
 - What are your Top 5 Talent Themes?
 - Which of your Top 5 Talents shows up most often at work?
 - Which Talent do teammates benefit from the most?
 - What can teammates do to help you operate most effectively in your Talents?

Team Talent Discovery

- What types of work are you naturally drawn to?
- What work gives you energy?
- What do teammates consistently come to you for?
- What conditions help you do your best work?
- What contribution do you hope to make on this team?

KEY CONCEPTS TO KEEP IN MIND

Different does not mean difficult.

Differences become strengths when teams understand and plan for them.

Team culture is either intentionally designed or unintentionally created.

Understanding talent patterns help teams get the best out of each other.

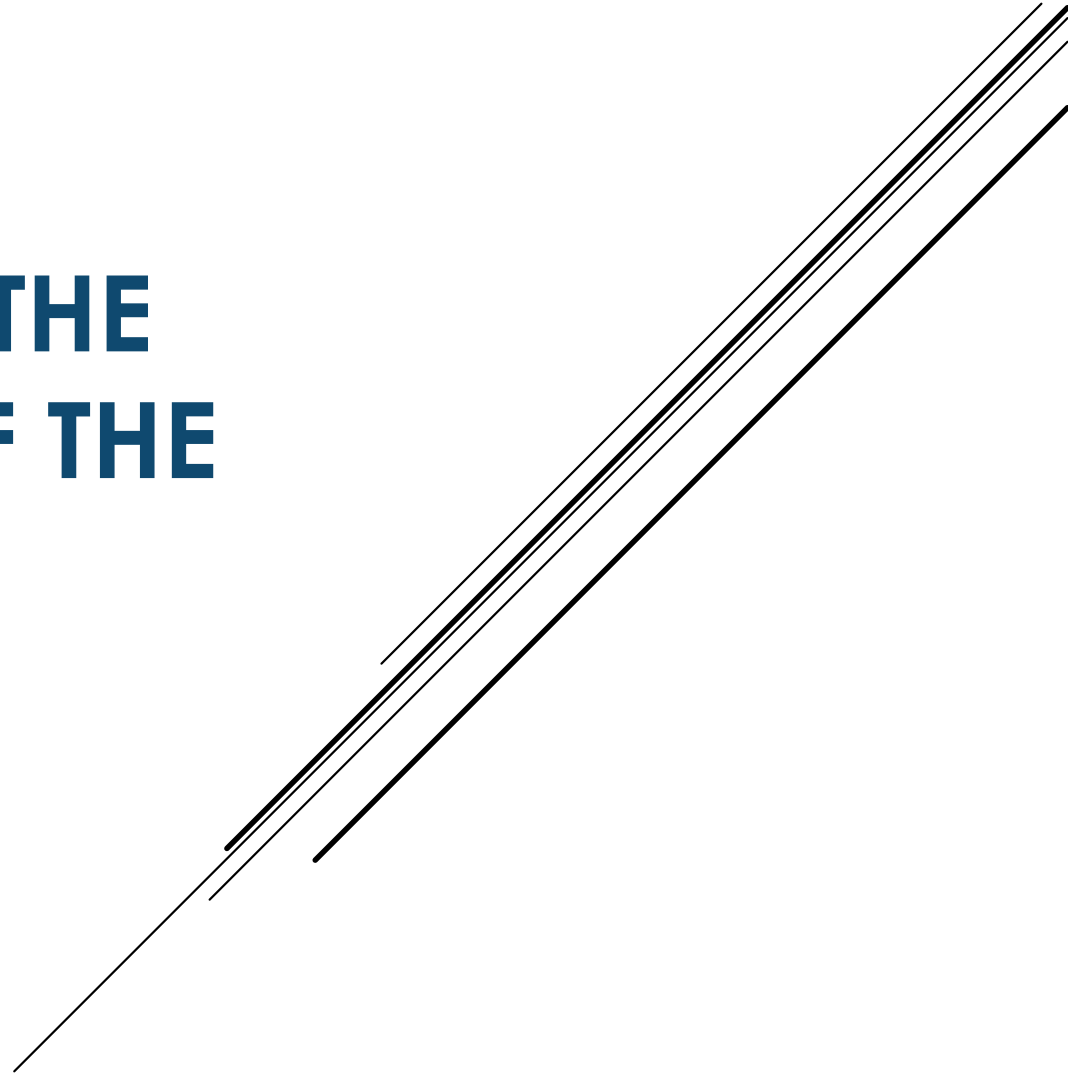
Team building is not a one-time kickoff exercise.

High-performing teams build connection, clarity, and trust throughout the life of the project.

Team building helps you do your best work.

Team building establishes commitments to one another.

UNDERSTANDING THE OUTER CIRCLES OF THE SYSTEM



Strong internal teams build stronger external relationships.


- ▶ Relationship-building is not “extra.”
 - ▶ It is part of effective audit execution.
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Which external relationship is most critical to your audit success?

- Management
- Specialists/SMEs
- Other team units
- Auditees
- All equally important

▶ **Teams can underestimate:**

- ▶ The cost of weak relationships
 - ▶ The value of proactive communication
 - ▶ The importance of credibility and consistency
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WHO AUDIT TEAMS NEED TO INTENTIONALLY UNDERSTAND

Management

- Early communication
- Risk visibility
- No surprises

Specialists, Legal & Other internal stakeholders

- Clear asks
- Context
- Efficient coordination

External entities


- Predictability
- Professionalism
- Trust
- Clarity about process and expectations



WHAT STRONG TEAMS ACTUALLY DO



STRONG TEAMS:

- ▶ Build clarity early
 - ▶ Understand how people work
 - ▶ Use differences intentionally
 - ▶ Build trust through reliability
 - ▶ Invest in relationships inside and outside the team
 - ▶ Communicate proactively
 - ▶ Adapt together under pressure
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- ▶ **What is one thing you can do on your next audit team to strengthen the center of the system?**

QUICK TEAM START CHECKLIST

- ▶ Clarify roles
 - ▶ Establish communication norms
 - ▶ Discuss work styles
 - ▶ Define escalation process
 - ▶ Determine decision-making process
 - ▶ Identify team strengths/gaps
 - ▶ Identify stakeholder relationships & which require intentional relationship building
 - ▶ Schedule quick retrospectives
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