

# ASTA9 Case Study

## UK-Based Healthcare

### Conference Paper

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## Introduction

Team performance is one of the most important aspects of business life. Most business activity is undertaken by teams and the way in which teams are set-up, managed, evaluated, and rewarded will determine to a lesser or greater extent the success of the business itself. It stands to reason that successful team performance is a primary focus of everyone in the business and should a team perform poorly then a lot of questions are usually asked. It seems sensible therefore those business managers should possess in-depth knowledge of the factors that constitute team effectiveness. Many, probably the large majority of them, do have a level of understanding of relevant success factors. Whether this understanding is accurate or proven is debatable. What we can say for sure is that many do not take the time and the effort to measure the factors and use a sensible and coherent approach towards

Figure 1: ASTA9



dealing with factors that show poorer performance.

### **ASTA9 Team Assessment**

The ASTA9 Team Assessment is a nine-factor measure of team effectiveness. It uses a research derived model of team effectiveness which highlights constructs that emerge from the team effectiveness literature combined with real life consultant expertise gained from working with many teams in industry, both private sector and public sector.

The nine factors are shown in Figure 1. The first four factors are what may be described as 'hard edged' team factors. They measure some of the internal processes within the team, what is the team strategy and direction, how are decisions made, how do the roles of team members align with the team purpose, and how well does the team get the daily delivery done? These 'hard-edged' factors are followed by four factors that may be described as the 'soft-edged' team factors. They are more concerned with the relationships within the team and the way in which people deal with each other. How much feedback does the team get from the team coach, how well do team members share knowledge and understanding, how well is the competitive spirit within the team harnessed, and to what extent is there a strong camaraderie within the team? The final factor stands alone as a measure of the connectedness of the team to the rest of the business. Is the team well integrated with the rest of the business or does it operate in splendid isolation?

Of course, in the world of possibilities, there are a great many factors that affect team performance. But it would be

impossible to measure them all. The nine used in the ASTA9 are well supported from a theoretical and a practical point of view and are intuitively accepted by business leaders and team members as business relevant.

The ASTA9 is a benchmarked assessment. It converts average raw score ratings to percentile scores using a general working population benchmark. The percentile score shows the position of a team on the percentile scale in relation to the benchmark. A low percentile score means that the team members score themselves lower than most other team members in the benchmark table. A high percentile score means that the team members score themselves higher than most other team members in the benchmark table.

The main thrust of the instrument is to identify the strengths of the team and to identify areas of weakness that need to be addressed. Unlike personal style assessments such as personality constructs or team role constructs where there is no good or bad in a profile merely a difference in approach or 'style', the rating scale of the ASTA9 is value-laden and directive. To put it simply, high scores on the ASTA9 are good, low scores are bad.

Furthermore, the principle idea behind the ASTA9 is that all nine factors are important for effective team functioning. If one factor is poor it is expected that it will have an adverse effect on team performance one way or another. This contrasts with 'Strengths' theory which speculates that performance depends on a particular strength in one area of competency and is not

adversely affected by a deficiency or weakness in another area of competence.

The ASTA9 is therefore used to help teams to not only further enhance areas of strength but to work on particular areas of weakness.

# Case Study 1 —

## Southern Team

The first case study describes the pre- and post-ASTA9 profiles of a sales team operating in the South of England. It is made up of seven sales staff and is led by a sales manager. The team sells high technology products in the Biosurgery field. Biosurgery is a relatively new field of medicine. It relies on synthetic products that are biologically compatible which are used by surgeons as alternatives to naturally occurring materials which are hard to grow and to store, for example synthetic bone, synthetic glue for sticking body tissue together, and synthetic sealants for sealing blood vessels in the control of surgical bleeding. The team's primary customers are surgeons.

The team members would be considered account managers rather than sales representatives. Account manager is a new and emerging role in the healthcare field. In the past, sales representatives would be seen as relationship builders but they would refer technical questions, pricing issues, economic modelling, rebate and discount management, and multiple stakeholder contracting to more senior people. Account managers on the other hand would be expected to deal with these issues themselves. The procurement operations in the healthcare field in the UK have changed quite considerably in the last decade. Procurement decisions and healthcare product

use is less a decision for the primary user/ prescriber and more a decision made by multiple stakeholders including financial specialists, medical technical specialists, and procurement staff, all working together to drive down costs and drive up effective use using a combination of product efficacy, long term supplier partnering, and financial costs.

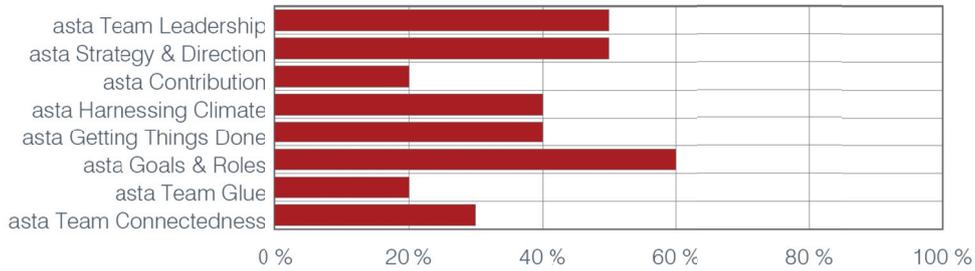
The Biosurgery team members therefore are people with a wide range of relational and commercial skills. They are well educated and experienced. All team members operate in the field. They work from home and visit customers on-site. They would meet in team meetings once a quarter, and again at the annual conference. They are supported by the team manager who also works from home. Additional support comes from the head office based marketing team who sets the marketing strategy for Biosurgery as a whole which the sales teams are required to follow.

## **PRE-ASTA9 PROFILE**

The team completed the ASTA9. see Figure 2. At the time the team manager was on maternity leave and the team was being led by the head office based marketing manager, who was consequently doing two jobs. Otherwise the team members remained the same throughout the year.

The pre-ASTA9 profile shows that there were a number of ASTA9 strengths and a number of areas for development. Highest of the factors is Goals & Roles. The team members rate this factor higher than those in the benchmark. This factor measures team

Figure 2: Pre-ASTA9 Profile for Southern Team



member understanding of the goals of the team, and the role that each team member plays in helping to achieve the goals.

In high performing teams there is a high degree of role and goal clarity for team members. If I am expected to contribute my talent and hard work towards my own work performance it is essential that I know why I am doing so, to know how it will contribute towards the over-all goal of the team, and to believe that my personal hard work will make a difference to the performance of the team.

Team members felt that they had better role and goal clarity than we would find in most teams. For example, scores on the goal-related items were both at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile, see Figure 3.

Figure 3: ASTA9 Southern Team Roles &



Two factors scored at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. These were Strategy & Direction, and Team Leadership. Taking Strategy & Direction first, the team reported average scores on how well defined the team strategy was, but reported lower than average scores on how well the team leader articulated the strategy. It is likely that this was due to the team leader at that time being an interim substitute covering maternity leave.

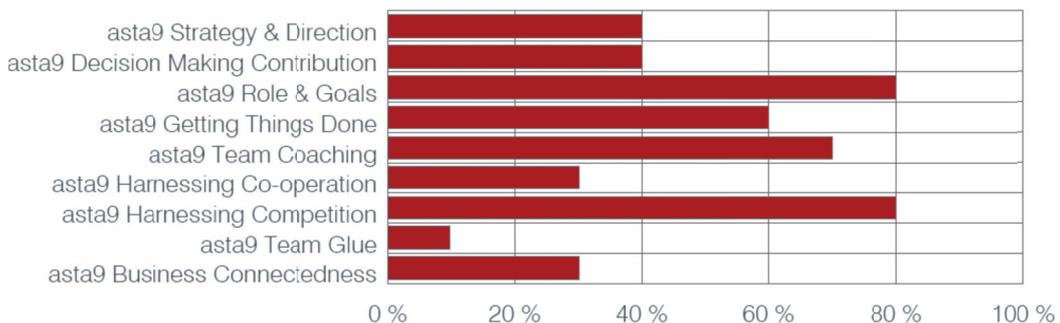
On the Team Leadership factor, team members rate the team leader well on areas associated with performance feedback, but less well on areas relating to the development of team member roles and responsibilities. Again this is likely due to the temporary nature of the team leadership at that time. The interim manager was focused on performance rather than on longer term career development.

## POST-ASTA9 PROFILE

The team completed the ASTA9 again twelve months later, see Figure 4. We can see that there have been a number of changes in the profile from twelve months earlier. There have been a number of profile improvements; Team Coaching, Roles & Goals, Getting Things Done, and Decision Making Contribution.

Half way through the year the team reverted back to its permanent team manager who is an experienced sales manager. The interim manager moved back full time into the marketing role. Team members twelve months later now rate the area of career development much higher indicating that the sales manager has a longer term focus on the team compared to the interim. There was also an improvement in scores relating to performance feedback from the sales manager to the team members (increased from 80<sup>th</sup> percentile to 99<sup>th</sup> percentile).

Figure 4: Post- ASTA9 Southern Team



The score on the Roles & Goals factor shows an improvement of 20%, moving from what was an already above average score of 60<sup>th</sup> percentile to the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile, suggesting an even

greater focus on personal objectives, role clarity and goal achievement. Evidence from talking with the team manager suggests that the team members are receiving more in-field face to face personal time from the team manager compared to twelve months ago. The sales manager now provides a greater amount of face to face in-field support, accompanying them on field trips, providing coaching and one to one support and undertaking regular performance meetings to review progress, to help set up call plans that are tailored for the account manager's region, and to support corrective actions where these are required.

Although account managers work autonomously and from home it is interesting, from a team performance perspective, how important it is that they receive regular 'quality' attention from their manager. They are autonomous but rely quite heavily on support and feedback from their manager. We have seen this time and again with teams. And it seems to be a critical variable not only in field based teams but in teams that are office based too. We have seen evidence from office based teams, even teams whose members sit in the same room, that one to one, regular quality feedback from the team manager contributes significantly to higher scores on the ASTA9.

The increase in attention that the sales manager is providing is also the likely explanation for the improvement in the score on the factor Getting things Done. This factor measures those aspects of team working that are needed for the daily delivery of work; having effective team meetings, having effective systems

and processes, having the right skills and knowledge in the team, and so on. Scores on some of these aspects have gone up in the year, some have gone down. The main difference in the change in the factor score appears to be the effectiveness of team meetings.

Team meetings can be a drain on team effectiveness if there are too many, if they go on too long, but most importantly, if the outcomes of team meetings are unclear or superfluous. One of the most significant criticisms of team meetings from team members is that they are often a waste of time because of poor outcomes. High performance team working is characterised by the quality of team meetings rather than the quantity, and well organised meetings that carry a sense of business purpose are the ones most highly praised. We can see this in evidence from many of the responses that we get from teams. In over half the teams that have participated in ASTA9 the team members have requested more effective team meetings.

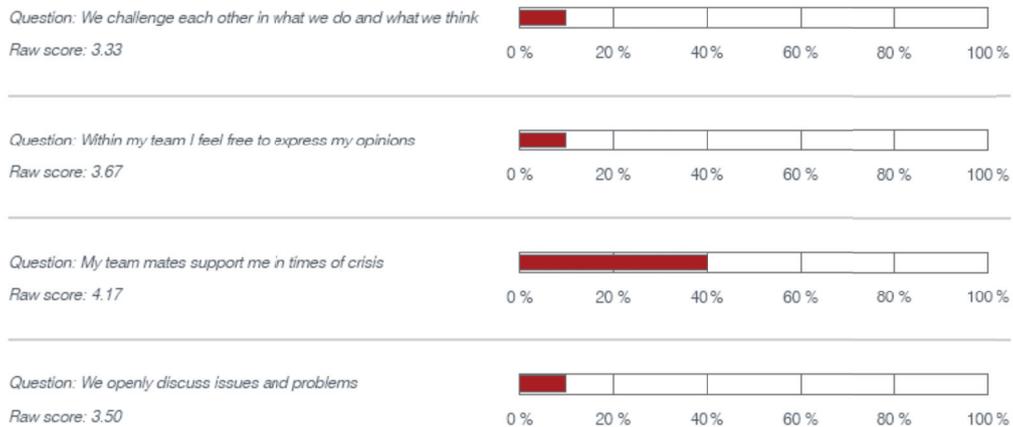
Only one factor has shown deterioration, the Strategy & Direction factor, which has fallen from the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile to the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile. Evidence from the team manager suggests that there is a specific reason for this; a general dissatisfaction amongst the team with a business driven strategic plan being adopted for the launch of a new product. According to the team manager the business strategy involves promoting the product to one set of customers and the business has developed a portfolio of marketing materials, literature and promotional aids to support this strategy. The team members and the team

manager believe that the product would be better aimed at a different set of customers and suggest that this different set of customers has expressed a much higher level of interest in the new product than the one the business is trying to target. As a result, a mini-strategy is emerging, one which is being defined within the sales team. The team is spending time promoting the product to the different set of customers and trying to develop an approach and a set of materials to support the mini strategy because it is finding that there are more immediate sale opportunities in doing so. The consequential conflict of interest is feeding in to the dissatisfaction score on the Strategy and Direction factor. From a conceptual perspective there are other issues that arise from this situation. For example, to what extent should a good business strategy be the product of corporate strategic fore-thought and/or grass roots market driven feedback? And what should be the balance of these two perspectives? Some people would say that a good strategy is one that not only predicts the longer term market but shapes the longer term market and that by definition a strategy should look to the long term even if that means making some smaller sacrifices in the shorter term. Furthermore, a business strategy needs stability and should avoid chopping and changing in response to short term market reactions. Others would say that ignoring more immediate market feedback will run a business out of cash while waiting for the longer term strategy to come good, and that grass roots market reaction provides valid evidence of whether a strategy is likely to succeed. Another conceptual issue more relevant to the operation of the team is

the effect of a strategic conflict on the morale of individual sales people. By their nature we can assume that sales people are motivated by securing business, especially where monthly and quarterly targets are used within a performance management regime. Can we assume that the impact of a strategic plan which is not wholly bought into by sales individuals will have an adverse impact on individual motivation, more so than it might have on other people in the business?

One of the factors that is unchanged since the pre-ASTA9 is the Team Glue factor. This factor measures the extent to which team members feel safe and secure with the relationships within

Figure 5: Post-ASTA9 Team Glue for Southern Team



the team, allowing team members to talk openly and honestly with each other, to express their opinions, and to feel safe enough to challenge each other. The factor score is unchanged at the 10<sup>th</sup> percentile. Explanations from the team manager indicate that relationships within the team have not improved over the year, that there is an absence of inter-team

communication such as phoning one another, exchanging marketing information and intelligence, and a lower level of general support between each other than would be expected. Interestingly, the personal style of the individuals is not in question; there is evidence that team members phone members of other sales teams on a regular basis. So it would seem that the relationships within this team are the point of issue.

The text responses for this team in the post-ASTA9 measure show team members acknowledging the need for improvements in team member communication. One of the text responses is, "there needs to be more team building and team interactions just for the team. Meetings often involve outside guests and therefore the team does not interact fully and discuss matters that are relevant to the team."

Evidence from the team manager would support the lower levels of relationship focus. The sales manager describes the team as a little bit fragmented, a team of strong and competent individuals that know what they need to do and they go ahead and do it on their own, often feeling that they do not need to be part of or 'feel' part of a team. This is an interesting point. Does the team need to be a team? Can individuals who are talented and knowledgeable transact business and achieve required targets without the need to feel like they are part of a team? And in what way does the concept of the team bring added value to the individual team members and to the business as a whole?

## Summary for Southern Team

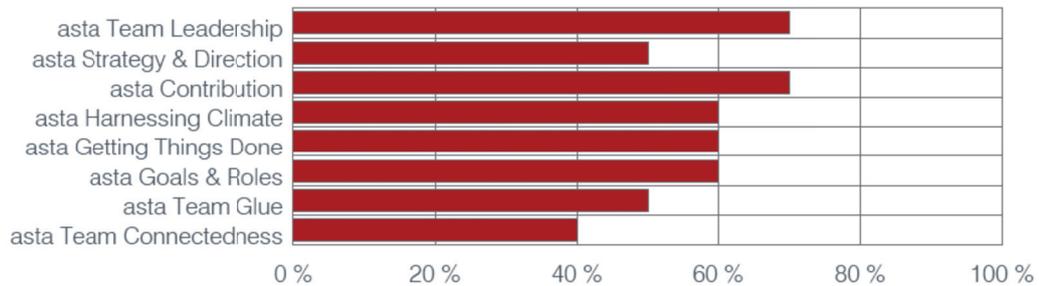
- Over the year there has been an improvement in some of the 'hard-edged' team elements, including Roles & Goals, Getting Things Done', and Decision Making Contribution'. This can be attributed to the greater degree of face to face focus that the sales manager gives to team members compared to the interim manager
- Over the year there has been an improvement in the Team Coaching score which can also be attributed to the greater focus from the sales manager
- There has been a fall in the score on Strategy and Direction which the sales manager indicates is due to team member dissatisfaction with the business strategy for the launch of the new product. Suggested team development activities would indicate a need to resolve this apparent conflict by meaningful dialogue with the business unit manager.
- There has been no change in the scores on the 'soft-edged' relationship factors of Team Glue, Cooperation, and Competition. Team development activities would suggest the need to improve the relationships between team members. Example suggestions may include team meetings that are devoted to relationship building, buddying systems e.g. joint field visits, special project team working requiring high degree of team member interaction, etc.

# Case Study 2 – The Northern Team

## PRE-ASTA9 PROFILE

The Northern Team is currently made up of 8 members and led by a sales manager. The team of 5 completed the pre-ASTA9 see Figure 6. The team manager is a relatively new manager.

Figure 6: Pre-ASTA9 Profile for Northern Team



The pre-ASTA9 profile shows that there were various areas of strength, and areas for development. The highest scores were for Team Leadership and Contribution. The Team leadership factor assesses the level of support the manager gives team members, and how effectively they provide help, guidance and constructive feedback. In June 2011, team members felt they had better leadership from their manager than we would find in most teams. For example, scores on support related items were

around the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile, see Figure 7. High scores for the Contribution factor suggest that team members feel they have a chance to influence decision making within the team, and feel as though their views are being taken into account, even when among the minority. In June 2011, the team displayed scores in and above the 70<sup>th</sup> percentile for all items, which is higher than we would expect from most teams.

Figure 7: Pre-ASTA9 Northern Team Leadership items



Two factors scored at the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile. These were Strategy & Direction and Team Glue. With Strategy & Direction, the team reported higher scores for the articulation of the team’s future vision, but lower scores for how well the team leader articulated

the strategy. It is likely this is due to the manager being relatively new to the role, and therefore not effectively being able to articulate how his strategy related to the work of individuals.

On the Team Glue factor, members reported high levels of support from fellow colleagues and the degree to which they challenge each other. However, team members expressed feeling less able to express their opinions freely, and low levels of commitment towards helping achieve team goals.. It came to light that there was an individual who was somewhat challenging for the manager, and was causing a rift between team members.

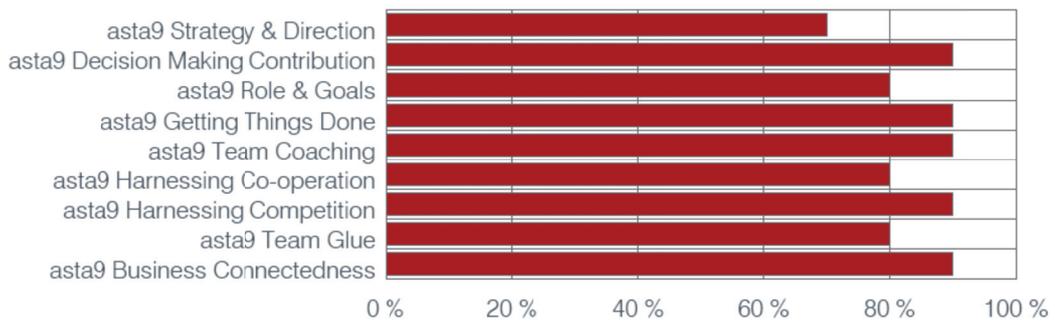
The Team Connectedness factor scored lowest, at the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile, which is an assessment of team work in relation to other teams within the business and how competition between them operates. These low scores suggest that the team were not entirely clear in understanding how the other teams in the business worked, and how their work had an impact on the business overall. This is most likely to be due to the lack of regular communication between the teams that would enable cross learning and motivation. This was mentioned in the Team Text Responses and is an area the manager was eager to improve on.

## POST-ASTA9 PROFILE

The team completed the post-ASTA9 again twelve months later, see Figure 8. We can see that there is a considerable improvement in the profile overall, and especially in relation to the factors; Strategy & Direction, Getting Things Done, Team

Glue, and Team Connectedness. It is in these previously low scoring factors that we see much higher than average scores for in the post-ASTA9 profile.

Figure 8: Post ASTA9 Profile for Northern Team



In the areas with the greatest improvement, Strategy & Direction showed an increase of 20%, suggesting that there is a clear plan for how to increase team performance, which is articulated clearly to the team members. Evidence from the team manager suggested an increased awareness of strategy, with less focus on sales and targets, and more on personal development of the team. This appears to be understood clearly by employees, who are given one-on-one time with the manager to realise their strengths, and how these can be put to use in the business.

The Team Glue factor showed an improvement of 30%, with significant increases in items such as feeling free to express opinions and the open discussion of problems. Evidence from the team manager would support the higher levels here. He described the situation with the employee who left the team, and how much of a positive effect that had on himself and the other team members. This individual had been especially challenging

and a cause for contention between everyone in the team. He had previously worried that it was only him who did not gel with this person, but it emerged this was not the case. This issue had had a negative effect on the manager, his enjoyment of work, and team morale. It had also left poor relations with customers that had to be rectified. Once this person had left, the manager reported a huge sense of relief, not only for him, but for all the team members as well. He describes the dynamic as having changed dramatically after the absence of one person, and has left everyone feeling more positive.

Since the new member of the sales team joined, the manager has reported much stronger team togetherness than it had been previously. This is an individual who he can trust and is hard working, yet comfortable socialising with him and the rest of the team in a way that is enjoyable for everyone. It is very important for the manager that all the team members glue together and with him individually, and this is one of the main criteria for the recruitment of employees.

However, there were decreased scores in the amount of support team members felt they received from others in times of crisis, which had decreased by 40%. There is no obvious explanation for this, but perhaps can be partly due to the changing dynamics of the team throughout the year, and the feeling of insecurity that may have developed as a consequence.

Five of the factors had scores at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile (Decision Making Contribution, Harnessing Competition, Getting Things Done, Team Coaching, and Team Connectedness).

Decision Making Contribution refers to the team members' feeling they have the ability to influence future direction, and rested at the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile in June 2012. This is likely to be due to the team manager constantly assessing the motivations behind individuals' place in the business, and how he can help in turning this into action. This way, the team members feel as though their skills are being put to use in a way that has a direct outcome on the business. They are comfortable enough to approach the manager with any queries they may have – knowing they will be considered fully, and action will most probably be taken.

The scores for the constituent parts of the Harnessing Climate factor have increased, which is a measure of stimulation and development from the team manager, and of cooperation and competition between team members. The harnessing of cooperation increased by 40%, and the consistent management of team competitiveness rests at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile. This is reflective of the 'jovial' atmosphere the team manager describes, where there is friendly motivation without any negative competition.

Within this factor, the team scored higher than average levels for the management of egos (99<sup>th</sup> percentile), which seems to result from the approach that the team manager takes towards the team members. In discussion of the situation concerning the

previous team member, and of other examples of issues in the workplace, it is apparent that an honest and open approach is employed, both from the manager towards the team and vice versa. The previous team member was disciplined off the record about their behaviour towards colleagues, and given a chance to explain their actions with the manager privately, before being given some short-term objectives. In this respect, team members would feel secure that egos were managed effectively, as there was a clear approach that the manager adopted in order to ensure the equal and fair treatment of individuals.

Business Connectedness showed an overall improvement of 50% (see Figure 9). Given this was previously at the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile, it seems team members now have a clearer understanding of how the other teams in the business work and how their team has an impact on the business as a whole. Evidence from the manager supports this, as he reported having tried to enhance connections with marketing and the other teams within the company. He is aware that this is one of the areas that could most benefit from improvement, but has clear plans to create opportunities for integration with the marketing side of the business, and allowing individuals to cross-work with other teams within the company.

Figure 9: Post-ASTA9 Northern Team Business Connectedness items



Within the Roles & Goals factor, team members reported an increase from 70%-99% in finding their goals challenging. This is evidenced by the team manager, who reports making a consistent attempt to push individuals towards reaching their full potential, with special focus on those who may be struggling or are new to the job, to ensure they have the correct skills base to begin with. Challenging the status quo is something he tries to do on a daily basis, in order to keep the work fresh and exciting, while keeping the team on their toes. There was a greater understanding of how their individual work contributed to the team’s goals, which had increased by 50% over the year, see Figure 10. This suggests greater levels of communication between the team and the manager, which is clear from talking with the manager as he understands the importance of regular communication with his staff, and goes out of his way to ensure he has time for this through more in-field contact and regular one-to-one meetings. This includes accompanying them on field trips, providing coaching and one to one support and

undertaking regular performance meetings to review progress. In cases where there is room for improvement, the manager provides appropriate support through outlining a clear strategy to follow.

Figure 10: Post-ASTA9 Northern Team Roles and Goals



This increased attention is the likeliest explanation for the improvement in scores for the factor Getting Thing Done, which is concerned with the organisation, training and progression of team members, and ensuring that progress against objectives is monitored properly. Scores from the post-ASTA9 were significantly higher than we would expect from a team, with an increase of 30% since the pre-measure. Team members reported effective management of work flow, and a full evaluation of any implemented changes. The most effective change is the clear outcomes of meetings, which increased from 60-90%, and suggests that team members feel satisfied after meetings that they know how to proceed in completing their aims. However, appliance of skills and knowledge within

the team rested at the 40<sup>th</sup> percentile, which suggests there is still room for improvement here.

Evidence from talking with the team manager supports the overall performance scores, as he has made a conscious effort during the year to focus less on sales targets, but more on individual development and letting individuals know they are valued for their own merits. It is clear that the manager concentrates on those individuals he feels are most in need, and will happily give up his time to boost their personal development. He understands that it is in the team's best interest that everyone is working to their full potential, and this will in turn help in reaching sales targets.

Team morale appears to be at a high, with there being no obvious frictions within the team, or between the manager and any of the team members. The text responses for this team in the post-ASTA9 support this, as most claimed there was "nothing really to change" about their job. There was a mention about increasing "involvement with marketing" and communication with other teams, but this is something the manager is aware of and is planning to improve. More positive comments noted how close-knit the team felt, and how much support and leadership was offered from the manager, which created a great "team spirit" and an overall "positive and focussed attitude".

He feels his has become a lot more experienced in the past year, through using leadership and communication skills to manage people who were originally peers. There seems to be a

lot of mutual respect among the team and the manager, where everyone is treated as equals and the focus is on personal development and not just sales. This environment will have created a healthier working environment for the team members, and thus allowed for more positive attitudes with clients. There is always space for people to move up in the company, and this is something the manager fully encourages in his attempt to help the team further their careers.

### Summary for Northern Team

- There have been improvements in all factors over the past 12 months, with many now at the 90th percentile.
- Team Glue has improved significantly, which can be attributed to the absence of one team member who was having a negative effect on morale and relationships within the team.
- There has been a change in approach by the team manager, who concentrates on developing individuals, monitoring progress, and understanding their motivations. There is a clear strategy concentrated more around personal development, and less around sales targets.
- In reference to the post-ASTA9 text responses, the team manager is making an attempt to increase communications between all the teams, and allowing for integration with the marketing side of the business.
- There is currently a focus on integrating the 3 new team members into the current team of 5, and establishing

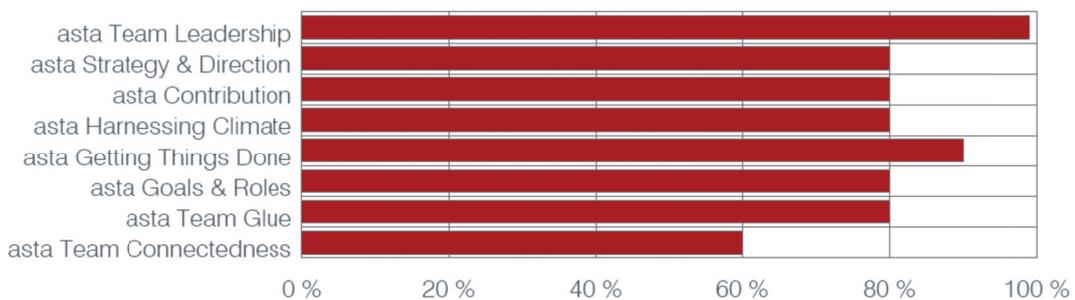
positive relations between the manager and the team as a whole. Team building activities are planned to tackle this.

# Case Study 3 – The Midlands Team

## PRE-ASTA9 PROFILE

For the pre-ASTA9 team assessment the Midlands Team was made up of 6 members and led by a sales manager. The team sells the same products as for the Southern team and the Northern team. The pre-ASTA profile is shown in Figure 11. We can see that the profile is at the top end of all of the factors. The one factor that falls below the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile is the Team Connectedness factor, which measures the extent to which the team knows what is going on elsewhere in the business.

Figure 11: Pre-ASTA profile for Midlands team



The profile clearly shows a team that is doing well. The 99<sup>th</sup> percentile score for the Team Leadership factors shows that the team members enjoy the way in which the team manager leads

and directs the team. The team members rate the manager as very competent.

In an effort to determine the foundations for this kind of profile we interviewed the team manager and asked about the team dynamics, relationships within the team, and key aspects of his managerial style. The qualitative evidence from this interview supports the scores:

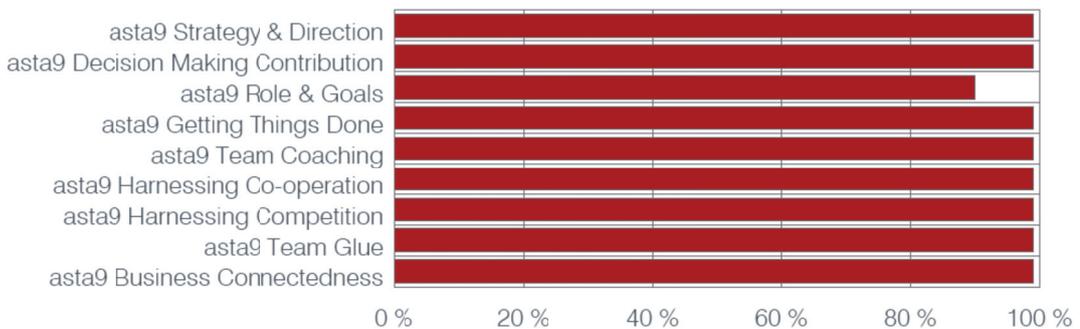
“This is a good group of people. I was happy with all of them. There was no-one that I felt was not doing well. I pretty much hand-picked them. I didn’t inherit them. I have recruited them all over the last four or five years.”

- Even when I recruited a new person into the team it wasn’t a problem for her, or for the existing members. She was challenging, a different kind of person with a strong personality. But she fitted in and from the start she supported the team and what we were trying to achieve, even during her times of frustration.”
- “I did a lot of individual support, focusing on individual performance in own territories. This was something I focused on a lot.”
- “I actually scored my team down last year because I felt that they could do better. There was room for improvement and I wanted them to see that.”

## POST-ASTA9 PROFILE

The team completed the ASTA9 again twelve months later, see Figure 12. We can see an improvement from what was already a high scoring profile. The post-ASTA9 profile shows all scores at the 99<sup>th</sup> percentile apart from Roles and Goals which comes in at the 90<sup>th</sup> percentile.

Figure 12: Post-ASTA9 profile for Midlands Team



This is the highest profile we have in our database and of course the key question is how has the team done it? The interview with the manager centered on what has changed since the pre-ASTA profile last year. It appears from the interview with the manager that there were three key aspects that seem to have contributed to the improvement in scores.

The first was around the team’s attitude towards benchmarking themselves against other teams. Although last year the team scored above average, the fact that it was not at the very high end of the scale was something that the team members wanted to address. The team manager brought out a sense of competitiveness for the team, to reach for the higher ends of the scales, to be not just a good team but an exceptional team.

- “We wanted to be the best. The best in the Company certainly, but also to be up there with the best teams in other Companies too. I wanted us to have a proudness, and to be knowledgeable, and capable versus other teams. The team took this on board and bought into it.”
- “Prior to the assessment last year we lacked awareness about how we compare with other teams. With the assessment we knew how far we still had to go.”

The second thing that happened was a change in team meetings. Prior to the first ASTA assessment there had been an embargo on team meetings. They are expensive and can result in a lot of time off the road. Some of the text responses from the first ASTA assessment reflected the lack of team meeting time, e.g. “To meet more and more discussions face to face,” and “Being able to meet up more regularly would be good.”

As a result the team manager pushed back on the embargo and explored ways to achieve more team meeting time without the traditional problems of cost and extensive time off the road. The meetings now are held during the day in a house of one or another of the team members. There are no overnight hotel stays and no hotel meeting rooms.

The increase in the team meetings allowed the opportunity for the team to consolidate a lot of their communication about systems and processes needed to support them in their work. There was more commercial support for each other. The meeting also provided the opportunity for the team manager to talk about the team strategy and direction. All of the sales teams

involved in the ASTA9 exercise were dealing with a range of commercial activity but there appears to have been two key strategic imperatives that galvanised the teams. The more important of these was defending existing sales against a greatly increased level of competitor commercial activity which was targeted at one of the Company's existing products.

- "I would say this formed as much as 60% of the activity and conscious thought of all team members due to the very nature of the competitor threat and the fact that if we lost any business you could write off the year. I would say that this situation formed as much of the leadership, strategy, direction, competition and team glue as anything else."

The second imperative was the launch of a new product which required a good understanding of the launch strategy and an ongoing visibility within the team as to the progress of the launch. The team meetings provided the opportunity to deal with the launch in a coherent way and for the team manager to talk face to face about the launch and about the over-all team vision.

- "They were focused and concentrated. We dealt with the ongoing day to day actions for everyone and we made sure that all actions were followed up."
- "The key to success for any team is about so many little things and getting them right. The so many little things all add up to a strong and effective team."

The third thing that happened was an adjustment in the manager's approach towards leadership. In addition to continued individual coaching and performance management, the manager added a number of style changes:

- "In the past I have perhaps lead my team from the front and expected them to follow. But this year, I started to ask them to take on more leadership responsibilities for themselves."
- "I introduced 'visualisation' techniques. Instead of describing and explaining what specific outcomes I wanted them to achieve, I laid out more strategic ideas and asked them to visualise what this could look like and visualise what they could do to achieve it and the expected results. I then monitored against those results. They set up their own goals through the visualisation technique."

#### Summary for Midlands Team

- The pre-ASTA assessment showed higher than average scores across the board with the highest scores being achieved on the Team Leadership factor.
- The team used the pre-ASTA profile to benchmark itself and to instill a desire to improve the profile yet more, to aim to be one of the best teams in the Company and beyond.
- The introduction of more face to face meeting time provided the spring board for the team and the team manager to deal effectively with competitor commercial

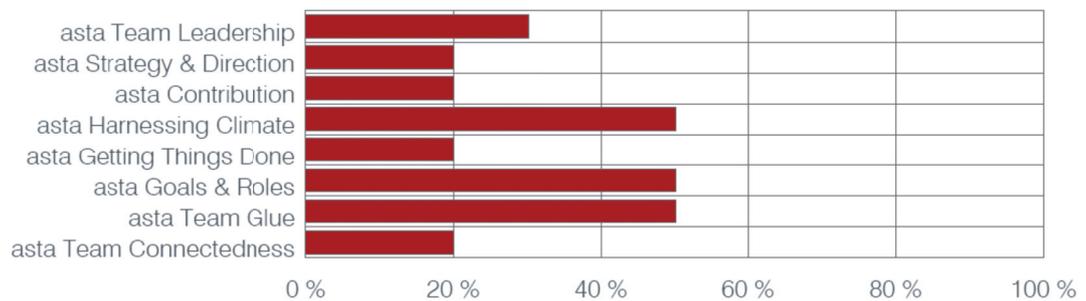
pressure and the new product launch. The team meetings were used to provide commercial support for defending existing sales against increased commercial pressure and for mapping out the product launch. In addition, the meetings were also a chance to deal with the day to day team issues, “getting so many little things right.”

# Case Study 4 – The Specialist Team

## PRE-ASTA9 PROFILE

For the pre-ASTA9 there were six members of the team. It was a unique team compared to the others in this case study since it was an acquired team, part of a business acquisition that the firm made earlier in the year. All of the team members at that stage were former employees of the acquired firm. The team manager, however, was an existing employee of the acquiring firm. Figure 13 shows the pre-ASTA profile. As we can see, the profile indicates a number of areas where the team has difficulties.

Figure 13: Pre-ASTA profile for Specialist Team



There are issue in relation to mainly the strategy and direction of the team, as well as in relation to the systems and processes that were operating. Some of the softer factors such as Harnessing Climate and Team Glue did not suggest problems.

It was clear from the qualitative data generated at the time that team members were unhappy with the new culture that existing within the firm to which they became a part. The acquiring firm was a far bigger operation, a global player in the healthcare field. It was more process orientated, more structured, with more reporting obligations, more quantifying, and had a greater commitment towards corporate strategy. This was in contrast to the firm the team members used to work for, which was very small and provided more role autonomy to the team members.

The team manager struggled to transition the team members into the new culture and ways of working. She was attempting a number of difficult interventions, each one in itself bringing major challenges. She was attempting to establish her authority on what was previously a team with different and entrenched ideas and working practices. She was trying to overcome resistance to a new strategy which many of the team members were opposed to. She was trying to introduce new system and process changes which required the team members to be more accountable for day to day activity, another change which met with resistance. She was managing a team that was spread across the whole country, including Scotland.

Some of the detail in the ASTA9 profile reflects this very difficult situation. There were low scores on the leadership factor indicating a low level of satisfaction with the way the manager was dealing with the team members – lack of support, lack of information, lack of appreciation, and a lack of trust.

There were also low scores on the Contribution factor: no chances to influence the direction of the team, lack of democracy in decision making.

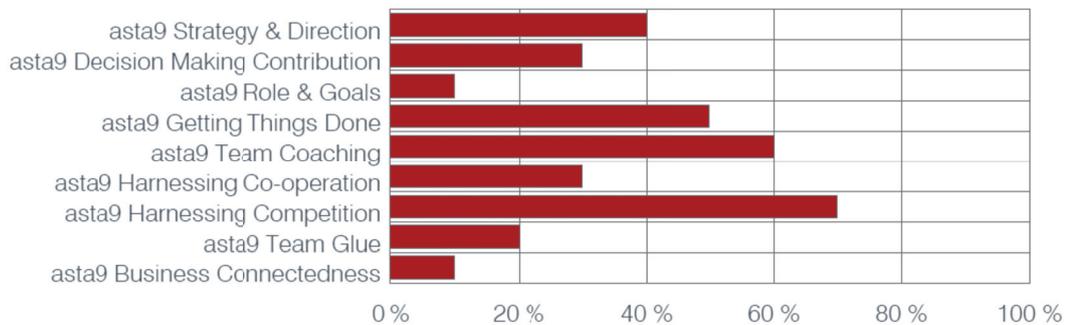
There were also low scores on the Getting Things Done factor: dissatisfaction with systems and processes, skill and knowledge of team members not used effectively, poor change management.

There were low scores on Team Connectedness: the team not feeling a part of the bigger organisation, the team members not knowing what other teams did and feeling like other teams did not know what they did, general feeling of isolation.

## POST-ASTA9 PROFILE

The team completed the ASTA9 again twelve months later, see Figure 14. Over-all, it is still a somewhat disappointing profile. There are three notable improvements in the scores. Team Coaching has improved by 30 percentiles, and the Getting Things Done has improved by 30 percentiles and the Strategy and Direction score has gone up by 20 percentiles.

Figure 14: Post-ASTA9 Profile for Specialist Team



Despite the difficult circumstances the team leader appears to have made progress in providing support and leadership to the team and her reputation improved over the course of the year. Qualitative data suggests that she worked hard to overcome the resistance within the team to the new team strategy, and to the importance and benefits of the structured reporting requirements of the Company. She also introduced more routine monthly meetings, and increased the volume of one to one calls and face to face meetings. She also replaced two members of the team.

The original ASTA9 profiling introduced an urgency into dealing with underlying team issues. It created an alarm trigger which

allowed the team and its manager to pick up dissatisfaction. It stimulated the team manager and the team members into dealing with some of their communication issues, and some of their resistance to the way their new owners worked.

However, it seems that although progress was made it wasn't at the level that it should have been. On-going issues remained, especially around role clarity and business connectedness. Many of the team members continued to feel isolated and unconnected to the business, and alienated from the business strategy. Some of the detail in the post-ASTA9 shows that team members continued to feel a low level of commitment to the team and to the business strategy, low levels of support from both manager and colleagues, and on-going dissatisfaction at the level of influence on decision making.

Since the post-ASTA9 profiling major structural changes have been made by the 2<sup>nd</sup> line manager. The team as a separate unique unit has been split up. All of the team members have been absorbed into the local regional sales teams where they will report to the regional sales manager. They will continue to specialise in their technical area, but they are also being trained on the additional product range which others in the regional teams are familiar with.

A number of the team members left through the restructure period. Now, all of the original team members that were acquired as part of the acquisition have left the business and been replaced by newly recruited people.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that this major structural change is working out well. The team members feel part of the local regional teams where team spirit and team engagement is high. They are also gaining extra product knowledge and expanding their skill and knowledge repertoire which is helping them to improve role clarity and commitment to the business strategy.

### Summary for Specialist Team

- This was a unique team story. The team was part of a business acquisition and the team members were acquired by the Company. The team members were used to autonomy and less stringent corporate processes. The team manager was put in from the Company. There was a high degree of resistance amongst team members to the new ways of working and reluctance to accept the style and approach of the new manager.
- The pre-ASTA9 profile indicated numerous issues which were subsequently addressed by the team including: more work around process integration, much more work around strategy and direction including strategy workshops, a greater degree of communication with the line manager including face to face meetings and more regular telephone calls.
- The manager worked hard to overcome the resistance of the team members to the new Company and ways of working. Nevertheless, two members of the team were replaced by the manager.

- The geographical spread of the team appears to be one of the difficulties. In an autonomous team geographical spread is not so much of a problem. Once the team came into the Company and there was a need for greater degrees of conformance relating to reporting systems, performance management, and alignment with the Company strategy, the geographical spread started to become a problem. The line manager struggled with regular contact, and the team members indicated dissatisfaction with the level of line manager contact, feedback and team discussion. There was a high degree of dissatisfaction amongst team members in relation to Contribution – being able to participate in decision making.
- Despite everyone's efforts the team did not significantly improve in the post-ASTA9 assessment
- Major structural change to the team was already in train by the time the post-ASTA9 assessment was made. The team has subsequently been through this structural change. All of the original team that came into the business as part of the acquisition has now left. Each of the new team members is now assimilated into the regional teams, line managed by the regional sales manager. The regional teams have much higher levels of engagement and team spirit into which the new team members have been introduced.
- There has been an expansion of the team members' role responsibilities. In addition to their specialist technical

responsibilities, they are also being trained on the existing product lines. There is the feeling that this role expansion is being well received, and is helping the regional teams to integrate the new team members well.

- This appears to be a story of attempted change of an entrenched team which, in the end, needed major structural change in order for it to be successful.

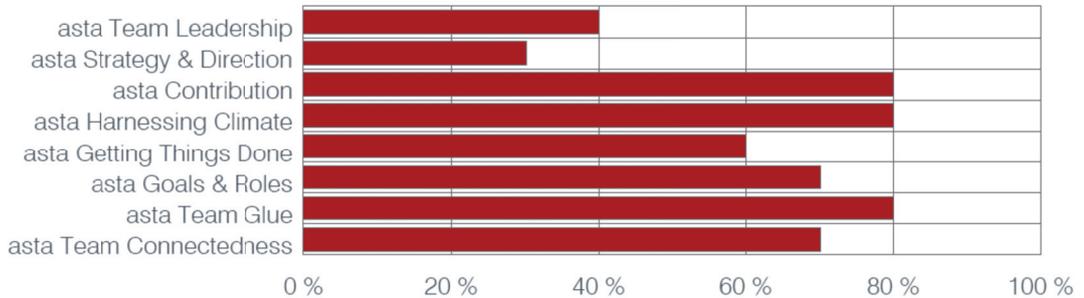
# Case Study 5 – The Management Team

## PRE-ASTA9 PROFILE

For the pre-ASTA9 there were six members of the team, the three regional sales managers, the manager of the specialist team, the manager of the marketing team, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> line business unit manager. Figure 15 shows the pre-ASTA for the management team. It shows a number of areas where the team is performing well. Team members score well on the Contribution factor indicating that they feel there is open and democratic decision making within the team and opportunities for them to influence decisions. They also score well on the Team Glue factor showing that there is a good positive atmosphere within the team. This is backed-up by high scores on the Harnessing Climate factor. It is also backed up by the free text comments made by the team:

- We are committed and engaged with our business. We care.
- Positive attitude
- The enthusiasm and professionalism of everyone enhances the business

Figure 15: Pre-ASTA for the Management Team



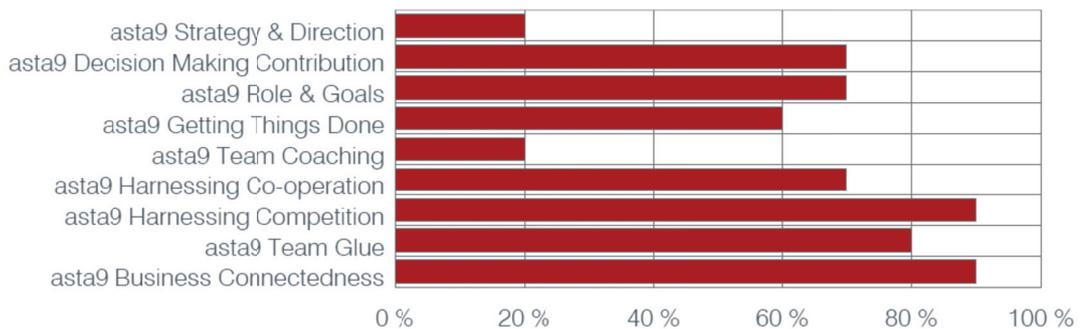
There are two factors that show a need for some attention. The Strategy and Direction factor showed the weakest scores. The Team Leadership factor also required some attention, mainly around the amount of time the leader was giving to the team members, which was not enough. In the ASTA9 feedback process there was a clear acknowledgement that these two factors needed some attention. Not long before the pre-ASTA assessment the Specialist team was brought on board and this acquisition needed to be strategically integrated into the business. At the same time, the over-all strategy within the unit in relation to existing products and services needed to be further enhanced and clarified. As a result, additional work was done by the team at the strategic level, with what was expected to be a clear strategic plan for the coming year, with a number of operational activities backing the plan up. Each of the operational activities were assigned to the individual team managers.

The year that followed was an opportunity for the team to integrate the specialist team and to follow through on the tactical activities to achieve the strategy plan.

### POST-ASTA9 PROFILE

The team completed the ASTA9 again twelve months later, see Figure 16. We can see that the post-ASTA profile is virtually identical to the pre-ASTA9 profile suggesting that there has been little progress in team performance terms over the previous twelve months.

Figure 16: Post-ASTA9 profile for the Management Team



The intervening twelve months saw a number of team issues coming to the surface. One of the key team interventions derived from the original ASTA assessment was the work that was done on the team strategy. A strategy was formulated with associated operational and tactical programmes of activities which were assigned to each of the team managers.

Feedback from the team manager shows that there were a number of issues that arose which prevented the successful execution of the strategy.

- Two of the key team stakeholders appeared to have differences of opinion over the over-all team strategy. One of the regional sales managers felt that the business unit should aim to develop long term partnerships with other companies to secure better customer access and more strategic sales opportunities. The business unit manager however, felt that given the financial imperatives of the Company as a whole, the business unit should be maximising sales using existing channels. This difference of opinion appears to have resulted in something of a paralysis in the team over future strategy and direction
- There were fewer than expected team meetings, “dates were very difficult to find”. As a result the team manager felt that he missed opportunities to deal with concerns over the strategy. Perhaps more importantly, he also missed the chance to monitor progress on the tactical operational projects which had been assigned to the team members

So despite other performance factors being strong, the key factors of Strategy and Team Coaching remained low.

The other factors scored well. As with the pre-ASTA9, the team spirit remained high and there continued to be a strong supportive culture within the team.

- “Great sense of purpose and drive for results. Striving for excellence and constantly looking to improve the way in which we work.”

- “Ownership of the sales number, collaboration, fun, hard working and committed to deliver”
- “The way we collaborate effectively to drive the business forward collectively. I am really proud our team”

As a result of the post-ASTA9 assessment further work has been done on the Strategy and Direction. This has also been precipitated by two of the team members moving on. With new members coming in, the natural team intervention is around the strategy factor, and the team coaching factor. The team coach is working on devoting more time to team members and more feedback to them, especially around the continual development of their roles.

On the strategy front, further strategy workshops were progressed and a new strategy focusing on four key elements has been established (people, partners, customers, and patients). A variety of tactical activities backs up the key team strategy. A greater number of face to face meetings have been booked into calendars and anecdotal feedback suggests that the team is more positive. Only a third ASTA9 profile would tell.

### Summary for Management Team

- The pre-ASTA9 profile showed a team with a strong team spirit and a supportive atmosphere, with a high degree of satisfaction with levels of influence and decision making
- It also showed low scores on the Strategy and Direction factor and the Team Leadership factor
- The main intervention was the formulation and embedding of a team strategy along with tactical activities

to support the strategy. The tactical activities were assigned to the team members. In addition, there was the strategic challenge of integrating the Specialist team into the business unit

- Over the year a difference of opinion over strategy amongst two key stakeholders in the team appears to have had a significant effect on strategic progress. In addition, the team leader indicates that he did not do enough to monitor the progress of the tactical activities – lack of team meetings, lack of monitoring procedures
- As a result, there was no change in the post-ASTA9 profile which showed virtually the same outcome as the pre-ASTA profile, with Strategy and Direction and Team Coaching being the low scoring factors
- Since the post-ASTA9 assessment the team leader has instigated further work on the strategy. It is worth noting that the team member with whom there was a difference of opinion has moved on. There has also been the major structural change with the Specialist team as outlined in an earlier case study.
- The additional strategic work has focused on four key elements, People, Partners, Customers, and Patients. There is additional tactical activity relating to these areas. The team coach has also agreed additional feedback mechanisms with more face to face meetings for the team.