INTRODUCTION

THE MODEL

I would like to introduce you to the TEAM FOCUS model, first describing the ideas at a high level here, then going into much more detail later in the book (each element has its own chapter). In each section, you will find a core concept, detailing a clear and straightforward set of SOPs (Standard Operating Procedures) with the following five parts:

- Concept: a brief overview of the chapter topic
- Rules of Engagement: three high-priority, action-oriented recommendations
- Operating Tactics: very specific tactical advice
- Stories from the Field: applications and insights from ex-McKinsey consultants and business school students
- Case Study: a true story of how the ideas were implemented during a pro bono consulting project

The concepts are captured by two acronyms that I believe emphasize the model's most critical elements and, more important, capture the essence of the model's two key components. The framework for the book is TEAM FOCUS, which is described here. Note that you will not find the TEAM FOCUS acronym in the training manuals of McKinsey. In the creation of this model, my starting point was the documentation of the key takeaways from my research and experience at McKinsey and other consulting firms that related to team problem solving. Over the past six years, I have been refining the model in pursuit of a framework that summarizes what I feel are the most important concepts for success in this arena. Thus, while the actual framework is not used at McKinsey, the concepts are consistent with those taught to the up-and-coming advisors to the top corporations in the world at McKinsey and elsewhere.

Interpersonal	***Analytical***
	Frame
Talk	**O**rganize
Evaluate	**C**ollect
Assist	**U**nderstand
Motivate	**S**ynthesize

Figure I-1 TEAM FOCUS Model

The first component covers four key elements of the *interpersonal* interactions that affect project management and team problem solving; thus the key word *TEAM*:

TALK—One of the most important elements of high-quality team problem solving is establishing very clear channels of communication. This chapter discusses special communication tools and provides guidance concerning best-process communication, inclusion of important constituents outside of the core team, and tips on managing interpersonal dialogue. The chapter also features a special section about listening.

EVALUATE—Teamwork is a dynamic process, and the most successful teams are those that are able to assess their current level of performance and adapt accordingly. The starting point for good evaluation is an open dialogue about expectations, group norms, specific work processes, and tools for monitoring progress. Implicit in the team evaluation process is an individually based personal plan that allows each team member to grow and develop on a continual basis. We all have strengths and weaknesses, and evaluation is the only way in which we can adequately identify where to focus our energy for improvement.

ASSIST—Once the evaluation process is underway, the next critical phase of the teamwork process is assisting others to complete the team's objectives. This builds on the Evaluate phase, which identifies particular strengths of team members that can be leveraged for the good of the team. Strategic leverage of unique capabilities is an underlying component of all "special forces" organizations and is just common sense. At the same time, team members must hold one another accountable for their assigned responsibilities. Direct, honest, and timely feedback will ensure that the Assist process is operating correctly.

MOTIVATE—The last element of the model's interpersonal component involves very specific strategies for motivation. One of the most important considerations is the realization that team members are motivated by different factors. Accordingly, engaging in informal, candid conversations at the beginning of the project about what those unique motivators are and paying close attention to individuals' drivers will go a long way. Similarly, the best teams are those that provide positive recognition for individual contributions and take adequate time to celebrate as a group (many of us seem to do less and less of this the older we get).

The second component of the model relates to the core *analytical* elements of successful project management. The word itself is conveniently right on target: *FOCUS*.

FRAME—The first element in the FOCUS component is widely regarded as the most important in the entire model. Essentially, framing the problem (*before you begin extensive data collection!*) involves identifying the key question that you are studying, drawing issue trees for potential investigation, and developing hypotheses for testing during the project. Good framing translates into more effective problem solving, as you will be ensuring that the work you are doing will translate into high-impact results—the ultimate measure of effectiveness.

ORGANIZE—This element is a boring but necessary step in preparing the team for efficient problem solving. All teams organize in some manner or another, but my research suggests that more efficient teams organize around content hypotheses with the end in mind. Unfortunately, in many cases, there seems to be a default approach that compels teams to organize quickly around the buckets that seem to surface most easily, rather than on the basis of potential answers to the key question under study.

COLLECT—The next element of the model provides guidance that leads to the collection of relevant data, avoiding the overcollection of data that are not useful. The most efficient teams are those that can look at the two piles of data collected and smile as they realize that the relevant data (pile 1) far outweigh the irrelevant information (pile 2) because the team continuously analyzed the difference.

UNDERSTAND—As the team gathers data, these data must be evaluated for their potential contribution to proving or disproving the hypotheses. At McKinsey, the term used on an almost daily basis is "so what?"—what is the meaning of the insight from these data for the project, and ultimately for the client?

SYNTHESIZE—The final element in the model is to synthesize the information into a compelling story. Here is where the well-known "pyramid principle" related to organizing a written report or slide deck comes into play. In this chapter, I cover the guidelines for putting together and delivering a great final product.

MARCHING FORWARD

This is a guidebook for action. Each chapter builds the toolkit—tool by tool. The goal is to have all team members review the contents before starting a project, then dig deeper into the chapters over the course of the project. The book can also be used in academic settings to teach team problem solving, consulting, or project management. Courses with any sort of field study or consulting project may be able to immediately apply the concepts and templates contained herein. Each chapter concludes with a first-person account of how the tools worked in a real engagement (our case study).

The case study is a key aspect of this book. While I lived these principles during my years at PricewaterhouseCoopers and McKinsey and reflected on them during my years of teaching them to students, it was important to put them to the test in a live engagement. Six students surfaced who were willing to work on a pro bono project with me as a learning and résumé-building experience. One of these students, Tim Krzywicki, will tell you more about it throughout the book as the "narrator" of the team's experiences.

THE CASE STUDY

My name is Tim Krzywicki, and I am a first-year MBA student at the Kelley School of Business at Indiana University. I have been asked to recount my experience utilizing the TEAM FOCUS model while working on a pro bono consulting engagement with Dr. Friga. I'd like to begin by giving you an overview of the project, providing the team members' backgrounds, and then finally explaining how this case study will unfold throughout *The McKinsey Engagement.*

My team was charged with the task of conducting research and issuing recommendations about the strategic plan of an unincorporated area in Johnson County, Indiana, known informally as Center Grove. Specifically, we examined three options for Center Grove: 1) incorporating as an independent entity, 2) inviting annexation by another neighboring town, and 3) doing nothing.

My team members and I volunteered (somewhat unwittingly) to work on this project both for the opportunity to get some real-life experience and also to have a real impact on the community. It was immediately clear to me that this project would be different from a standard business consulting engagement because it was addressing a public issue; however, this interesting dynamic also gave us the potential to affect an entire community. Adding to the unique nature of this engagement was the fact that the project had been initiated by a previous year's group of MBA students, so we were neither jumping onto a project nor starting one from scratch. Rather, we had to pick up the pieces and charge ahead, reviewing dormant and somewhat haphazard research with our eyes firmly fixed on our already-established final deadline: a presentation to key stakeholders at a town meeting in four months.

Our "superstar" team (bear in mind that Dr. Friga seems to call everybody a superstar) consisted of five MBA students—Alan, Bhavin, Rachita, Shalini, and me—and was headed by Dr. Friga as our engagement partner. We also had special contributions from Chris Cannon, a second-year MBA student who filled the role of engagement manager and is now serving the country as an Army officer in Afghanistan. At the time of the project, I was in my second year of Indiana University's joint JD and MBA program, but I was in my first year at the Kelley School of Business. My eclectic studies also include an undergraduate degree in engineering, so I provided broad knowledge as well as valuable nonbusiness expertise. Even without my multiple fields of study, however, the group members' talents were well balanced. Alan's background was in general management and finance, Bhavin had multiple degrees in computer information systems and information technology, Rachita had engineering and finance concentrations and was consequently quantitatively focused, and Shalini's unique contributions were marketing insight and a truly international perspective (she had lived in six countries and spoke five languages!). There were certainly overlaps of experience within our group, but our backgrounds and especially our interests were diverse enough to provide many perspectives and to help us to be creative as well as effective.

At the end of each chapter, I'll provide my insights into how the key points from that chapter's Rules of Engagement and Operating Tactics applied to our project. Keep an eye out for documents and charts, as I'm also including some of our team's relevant deliverables. You'll see that my reflections are hardly exhaustive; I've chosen to highlight the important points that best show how the framework functions in a real-life project. I'll be honest: some of our experiences were extremely positive, while others are most kindly described as less than neutral. Similarly, we used many of Dr. Friga's Operating Tactics, but we didn't use them all. Ours was not a perfect project, and we certainly ran into our share of obstacles; however, the Johnson County case study was a huge success, and from what I understand, it continues to have lasting impact in the community. More important for your purposes, though, it provides an arena where you can view the strategies and tools detailed in each chapter in a practical light, prodding you to think about what a successful implementation of your next project might look like. I hope that through this real-life application of the TEAM FOCUS framework, you will learn from both our bursts of (brief) brilliance and our mistakes.