

Article

Building High Performance Teams

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Organizations face a tough economic climate and good teamwork has a vital part to play in helping a business achieve its objectives. To succeed, a team needs the right proportion of people. The skills, experience and perspectives of a range of people need to be integrated.

Adair describes a team as “a group in which individuals share a common aim and in which the jobs and skills of each member fit in with those of the others”. However, not only does there have to be ‘fit’ in relation to skills; people need to identify and understand the behavior of their team members. So, how do you build a high performance team?

It relies on three factors:

- Self and team awareness – identifying individual’s strengths and limitations
- Recognize different contributions – teams bring together complementary skills and experience
- Plug the gaps – modifying behavior brings enhancements to the team.

“A familiar team model defines four stages to team development – form-storm-norm-perform”

The board of a company must be comprised of people who will drive the business forward, in other words High Dominance employees (Ds). But, it also needs a representation of other elements to ensure it’s not totally disengaged from the operation of the business. It is these different behavioral elements, combined with a lack of understanding of what each brings to the party, which can cause tension within teams. It is a level of understanding that some teams seem unable to achieve.

A familiar team model defines four stages to team development – form-storm-norm-perform. Within this model we can see clearly how the three success factors can be applied.

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Forming a team is a crucial first phase. What kind of team do you want to create and what types of people do you want in it? A company board can work in a very different way to a project team. In order to drive the team forward to achieve goals and objectives there needs to be a certain amount of D in the team. However Low Ds will regard a High Ds approach as similar to that of a bull in a china shop. The High Ds on the other hand will regard Low Ds as not bringing very much to the party with their overly hesitant approach.

Low Influence (Is) will view their High I team members as superficial time wasters who are not taking matters seriously enough. High Is will regard Low Is as taking all the fizz out of the lemonade with their dour, pessimistic approach.

The second phase – storming – is where teams can hit a glass ceiling. It is about discussion and debate but can turn into a ‘blame-game’ with people pointing fingers at the perceived short comings of others. One factor that differentiates “dream teams” from “teams from hell” is a strong platform of understanding. Self awareness and an awareness of other people’s style are crucial if a team is going to reach more ambitious performance goals. There needs to be an acceptance that WE have a joint problem and WE need a joint strategy to tackle it. Differences are not good or bad, better or worse

If the team is comprised of High Steadiness (Ss) they will tend to accuse the Low Ss of achieving very little, that they are too busy being busy. Low Ss will accuse High Ss of putting a brake on things, not allowing them to get on as quickly as they would like. If we look at how High Compliances (Cs) view Low Cs there is similar tension. A High C will regard a Low Cs approach as too cavalier and casual – they could view them as a bit of a maverick. The High Cs regard Low Cs as being picky to the point of obsession.

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A High Performance Team will be aware of the work styles of the different profiles and that each contributes to the team in its own way. Each member must recognize their own limitations and recognize that there are people on the team who can do things better than themselves. People need to cover the bases they are good at and concede to others where they are better.

Recognition plays an important part in the norming process. This is where a team will start to relate to each other, build commitment and achieve consensus. They don't have to agree but must concede that others have a valid point of view. A successful team will commit to group decisions, even though they might not personally agree with them.

To gain commitment and maximize the performance of the team, people need to modify their behavior to complement those of their team members. A High D will want to compete and be put under pressure. They will expect freedom and authority, innovation and diversification. A High I will flourish if they are given credit within the company for their accomplishments. They will want the opportunity to work through and with people and public recognition. They will expect favorable friendly relationships, group activities and lots of people. A High S will do best in a stable familiar environment, with specialized work that requires patience. They will expect structure, sincerity and a secure environment. A High C will want to work with clearly defined objectives and requirements. They will expect an ordered environment, reassurance and all the facts.

Teams fail because of mismatched needs, unresolved conflict, personality clashes and lack of trust. All these can be addressed through understanding and recognizing how each person in the team behaves and responds in different situations. Self awareness will create a strong platform of understanding from which more ambitious performance goals can be achieved.

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