



MANAGEMENT
DYNAMICS

THE DYNAMICS OF HIGH PERFORMING TEAMS

Alison Grieve and Jenni Miller

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INTRODUCTION

We have been part of, led and worked with teams for over 30 years and have learned that the experience of being part of a high performing team is aspirational, engaging and intensely satisfying. We also know that the results a high performing team can achieve are dramatic. Most people have experienced being a part of a high performing team, even if only for a short time, and enjoy sharing their experience, whether it's on the sporting field, stage or workplace.

After decades of working with teams on their development and cohesion, our frustration with the lack of a fully integrated approach to provide a practical toolkit for leaders led us to create a framework we call The Dynamics of High Performing Teams. This white paper explores the current state of teams, the future of work and the current world of work in which teams need to be more flexible and agile, where learning has to be faster and continuous, and where the leader needs to monitor and support the team regularly to achieve and then sustain high performance. There are many fabulous team models and tools available and The Dynamics of High Performing Teams goes beyond each of them to create an holistic approach. It is an integrated framework which allows teams to adapt and grow, honours current culture and practices and challenges us to think beyond our boundaries and aspire to be High Performing.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR TEAMS

Teams can be defined in many ways. We suggest that there are, in a nutshell, two types of team: simple or complex. Simple teams have a shared manager and the individual team members work independently of each other most of the time. An example would be a sales team where each individual does the same role for different sales territories. The leader can leverage the performance of the team by sharing best practices/learning from experiences of each other and motivate them to feel part of a community. Annual motivational sales conferences and sales events can create an environment where people feel part of a winning community and want to do more to contribute to the team's results.

The second type of team is a complex team where collaboration and genuine working on the same goal is required. They are an "interdependent collection of individuals working towards a common goal, who share responsibility for specific outcomes" (Sundstrom, De Meuse & Futrell, 1990). These teams may be made up of individuals who do not report to the same line manager and who are dependent on working together to deliver an outcome. So many projects where we need skills and contributions from other departments could also be included here. It is also the team where the manager may have individuals working for them and those individuals need to work together and collaborate, share information and build on each others' outputs to create the team goal.

J Richard Hackman states teams can "achieve a level of synergy and agility that could never be pre-programmed by organisation planners or enforced by external managers". Hackman (2002) asked members of a diverse set of teams, ranging from community health groups to a mutual fund company to military units, to identify the "root cause" of their team performance. For teams that were performing well, over 60% of the explanations had something to do with someone's personality or behaviour - frequently the team leader. For teams that were performing poorly, 40% of the initial attributions were about personality or behaviour. Similarly, Naquin and Tynan (2003) identified what they call a "team halo effect," in which individuals are far more likely to be identified as the cause of team failures than the team as a whole. Hackman also identified the timing of team interventions as critical to the performance of a team. Good timing means taking action to help a team at those moments when the team is ready to receive and use the help that is offered.

THE BUSINESS CASE FOR TEAMS

All too often, interventions are designed around people's availability to take time out for a "team away day" rather than when is the best time to support the team's development. Research by Connie Gersick (1989) suggests that the readiness of teams for leader interventions waxes and wanes across the team life cycle. Different issues are on team members' minds at different times, and interventions that address current issues are especially likely to take root and be helpful. Actions taken when a team is not ready for them – for example, talking about team members' relationships at a time when a team is fully preoccupied with getting an urgent piece of work accomplished - are unhelpful and often disrupt the positive aspects of a team's work processes. So, the role of the leader is critical, particularly their ability to observe and adapt to the changing needs of the team.

The current Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous (VUCA) world ensures this is even more challenging. We have seen organisations struggling with declining productivity and economic dynamism, the continuation of globalisation and the shift to emerging economies along with management practices stuck in decades old methods. The fundamentals have shifted and now we see increasing issues with mental health at all ages and according to Deloitte's Workplace Burnout Survey in 2015, at least 84% of millennials have experienced burnout at work. This is a very worrying shift. Whilst there has been a change in attitudes, culture and technology, there is a lack of change in how managers lead and develop their people and teams which means we have limited the possibilities of improvements in productivity. The working practices need to change to fully embrace the productivity and well-being benefits which are now possible through technology, globalisation and flexible working approaches.

People are indeed the most VUCA aspect of what managers and leaders need to deal with. Humans by their very nature can be volatile, are definitely complex and ambiguous. We would also argue that many team frameworks and models are stuck in the past – they are one dimensional and do not offer an agile and integrated support to managers and their teams who have to deal with increased levels of complexity. A systemic view is required.



THE BUSINESS CASE FOR TEAMS

Increased globalisation and changing work models mean that the rise of collaborative global working will only continue. Demographics are shifting and the ageing workforce will require different support than those of generation Z. Of course, the digital transformation has already affected many and will continue to do so. The benefits of robotics and artificial intelligence will transform and eliminate many jobs and at the same time create new ones. Collaboration on meaning, creativity and innovation will become ever more critical skills in human roles and the real advantages will be in the synergy of teams as we need the power of many to work through the increased complexity.

The possible benefits of high performing teams are well researched and documented. Blanchard (2010) measured a drop in employee turnover when teams are cohesive and engaged. Wiseman (2017) found that teams are creative and use existing resources more effectively, thereby becoming more productive when they are highly engaged. Marcus Buckingham and Ashley Goodall (2019) have identified that engagement creates increased motivation and business results through increased productivity, as well as increases in health and well-being. Guttman found effective teams deliver better results. The results of poor or mediocre teams are something we all know too well. The anecdotes from every group we work with are full of lost possibilities and opportunities.

As complexity increases, tasks can fall beyond the scope of the individual. According to Ernst & Young in their 2013 study: “Almost 9 out of 10 companies surveyed for this report agree that the problems confronting them are now so complex that teams are essential to provide effective solutions.”

In 2016, Harvard Business Review published an article about “collaborative overload” – the over-reliance on teams and collaboration. According to their data, time spent by managers and employees in collaborative activities had increased by 50% or more over the past two decades, but frequently not to the benefit of individuals or their organisations.

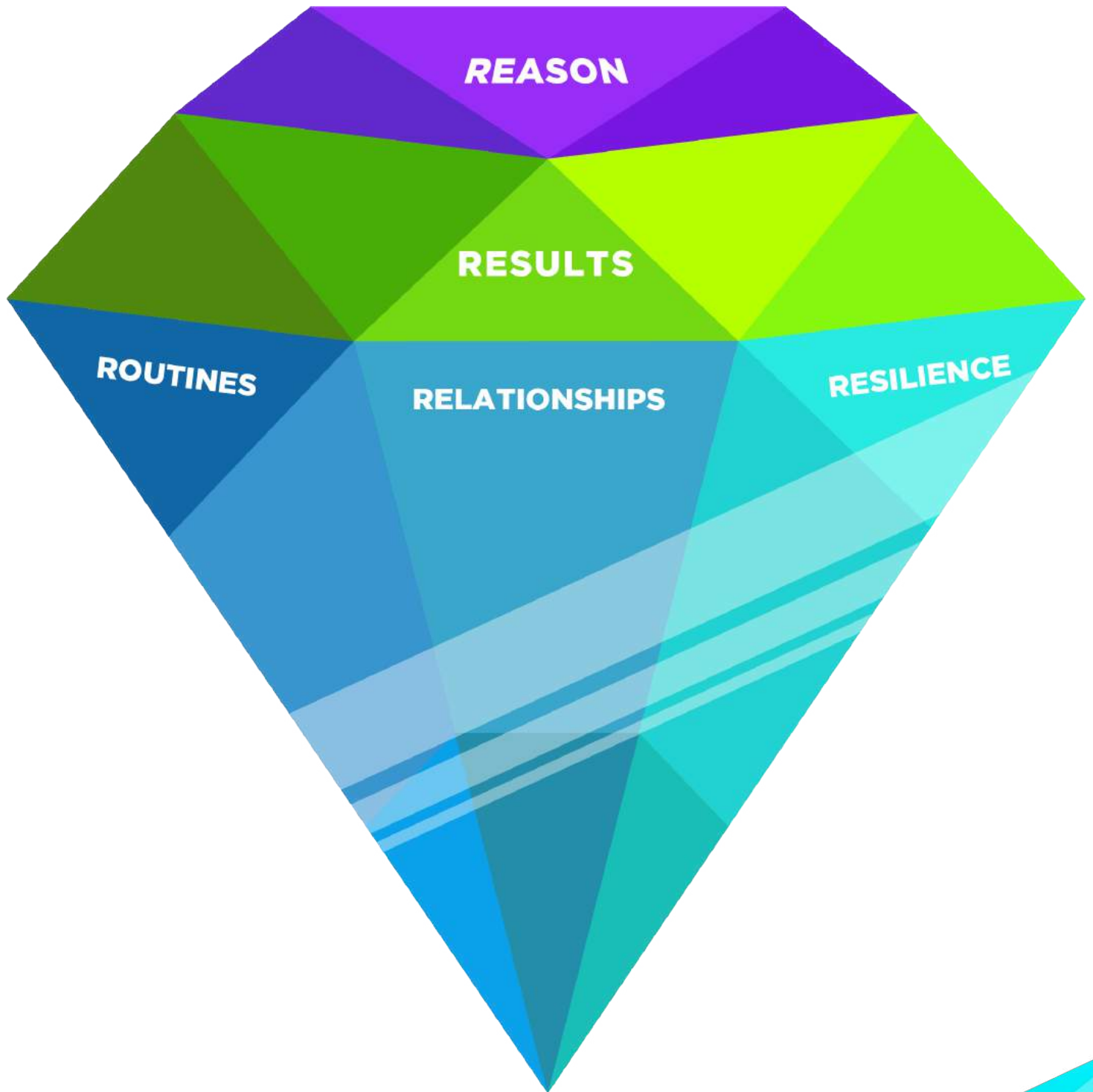
THE BUSINESS CASE FOR TEAMS

Time spent working in teams is on the rise and continues to grow. Duhigg (2017) found that teamworking had grown by 50% in the last 20 years. Virtual teams have also been growing exponentially, enabled by technology. This has brought benefits of global working for organisations and has also provided increased flexible working opportunities for individuals. Covid 19 has accelerated this trend and in 3 months we have seen organisations shift to homeworking en masse. However, the challenges for high performing teams who never meet face to face are significant. Individuals can feel isolated and disconnected from their team-mates. Emich & Wright (2016) reported an increase of 46% of virtual teams globally and with Covid 19 all teams who can are working remotely at least some of the time. Blanchard (2010) noted that approximately 60% of teams fail. In our experience, most teams believe they could perform better, whether co-located or virtual. They believe they lack the tools and support to be optimally effective. Even the highest performing teams would state they could be much more productive with the relevant support. With uncertainty though comes stress. Part of the problem is how long and when do teams start to change how they work to suit a new working paradigm and how do they have the resilience to keep going in the face of continuous change and disruption. The answer is of course in the Team – it needs to be dynamic.

“60% of teams fail”



THE DYNAMICS OF HIGH PERFORMING TEAMS



THE DYNAMICS

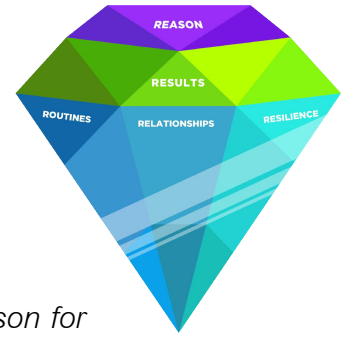
The Dynamics of High Performing Teams considers that we start from a volatile, changing environment with little stability and learns from the Agile approach many organisations are using. The first step is to define the Reason - what the team exists for, what its purpose is. This is what the Bruce Tuckman's Stages of Team Development Model (1965), The Sibbett/Drexler Framework with their High Performing Teams model and Simon Sinek in Start with Why would recommend. However that, on its own, is not enough. The team Reason needs to be congruent with the organisation's goals and also to the individual and what they get from being part of the team.

A Reason has no value at all unless it is supported by Results. What will be delivered or be the outcome? Understanding and sharing the individual as well as the team Results ensures clarity, reduces duplication and provides focus for collaboration. Of course, we cannot discuss teams and achieving Results without introducing Relationships. Complex, with multiple layers and considerations, Relationships are not fixed and can change quickly with huge impacts on the team and its performance. Patrick Lencioni has developed many useful tools to improve the effectiveness of the relationships with his 5 Dysfunctions of Teams (2002).

The Routines which the team adopt for communication, collaboration, support, decision making and so on have a dynamic effect on the Relationships and therefore the Results. Unless these are all reviewed regularly then the impacts may be less than effective and team potential and therefore performance will be reduced. In times of change its critical to make sure routines are fit for purpose and to eliminate unproductive routines.

Resilience is critical to sustaining high performance of both the team as a whole and the individuals who make up the team. The ability to withstand adverse events, continuous change and ongoing uncertainty can quickly take its toll. So, review of the dynamics becomes the most powerful lever as it allows changes and shifts to be identified quickly and in a timely manner and therefore action can be taken. Teams need to build in reflection and learning processes as well as encouraging an open improvisation to create novel solutions. Managing and monitoring the energy levels whilst this happens is critical. The Dynamics of High Performing Teams framework provides a continuous process and multiple tools for developing and sustaining teams' high performance.

REASON



Get really clear about the team's purpose and value to the organisation as well as individual team members' connections to that reason. This is the team's reason for being and the starting point for everything.

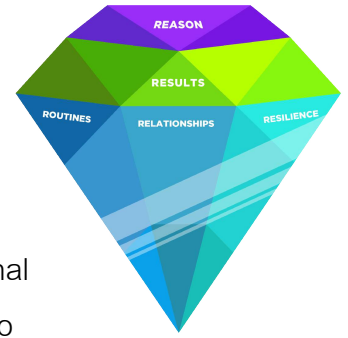
This is also where we connect every time we review one of the other dynamics. It holds the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of the individual and team at its core. Without this well-established foundation, the team and individuals within the team cannot achieve high performance. According to Simon Sinek (2011), the neo-cortex (the reasoning, analytical and critical thinking part of brain) is triggered when we think about *what* we do. The limbic system (the emotional part of the brain) is triggered when we think about *why* we do something. This bit of our brain needs to be triggered for us to feel motivated, engaged and most importantly, fulfilled. In times of uncertainty we naturally narrow our focus when what we need to do is raise our sights and gain perspective.

McAdams and De St Aubin (1992) have suggested that the desire to be valued and needed by others and the pursuit of social worth is a basic human motivation. In 2000 Ryan and Deci confirmed the same thing, it's a normal part of human adult growth and we develop into wanting to improve the world in which we love and have an impact on others. It's also critical so individuals mental and emotional wellbeing and enables us to be more resilient. Meaning from our work is motivating. Experiencing social worth makes individuals feel that their actions matter in the lives of other people and increases a sense of belonging (Elliott, Colangelo, & Gelles, 2005).



**“Happiness comes from *what* we do. Fulfilment comes from *why* we do it.”
*Simon Sinek***

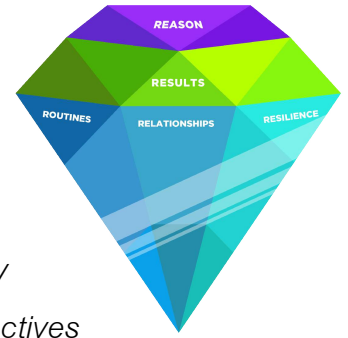
REASON



Many people do not connect with the team, organisation or even their own personal purpose. This means that no matter what the leaders does, the team is resigned to mediocrity at best. Individuals do not see the point in team meetings, they are a waste. These individuals are just there to do a job. This misses the possibility of allowing people to do something of worth and contribute no matter what that job is. If the organisation is prepared to pay someone to do a job, then it must value the outputs. How can we share that value more explicitly beyond the monthly salary? That is what the Reason is all about. Getting really clear about your team Reason builds loyalty, discretionary effort and above all makes for healthier, more productive people. The toolset for Reason includes identifying and aligning how the individual, team and organisation can be aligned in their purpose in a practical and easy to communicate way. How to say it in simple terms in other words.

“If the organisation is prepared to pay someone to do a job, then it must value the outputs. How can we share that value more explicitly beyond the monthly salary?”

RESULTS

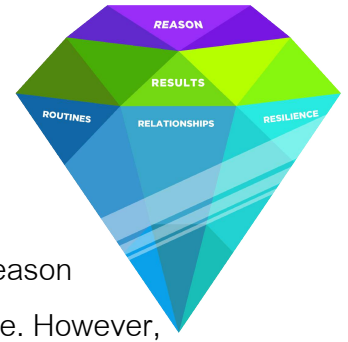


Get absolute clarity about what your team is accountable for delivering, in a way which is easily memorable and visible for the whole team. Align everyone's objectives and share that with the team. Encourage teamworking across shared deliverables.

Lynn and Kalay (2015) found that a lack of clear vision and role clarity was associated with a lack of performance. Aligning team and individual goals with the vision creates clarity and ensures everyone is working on things which matter to the team. They need to be clear about who is working on what and how they work together. Their research was carried out in Apple, IBM and HP and they found that vision clarity has a significant impact on overall performance. Liz Wiseman (2017) found a multiplier increase in productivity of 1.97 between highly effective teams who had clarity and the results from less effective teams. Effective teams focused on achieving results, efficiency and supporting each other. The less effective teams focused on work atmosphere and competed amongst themselves. The effective teams delivered on average about \$4 million in additional sales per team.

In addition, team members observe each other and make judgements about how each other are performing. Research has robustly and consistently found that teams perform more effectively when members' appraisals of each other are in line with their own personal self-views (Swann et al., 2004; Polzer et al., 2002). Having a culture of feedback on results and how people are achieving those results is important. This needs to be agile – just in time and about the results. The feedback - and we will talk more about this in Relationships - needs to be objective and not seen as a personal attack. Google has found psychological safety as the number one criteria for a high performing team. Without this, the team members will not provide feedback and will not learn from each other and improve their own self-awareness.

RESULTS



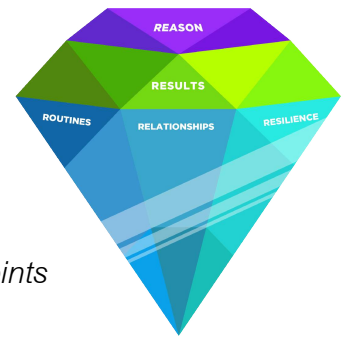
Many individuals and teams do not write down their goals and aspirations. The reason frequently given is that it's a bureaucratic exercise and they are quickly out of date. However, this should not be a once a year activity. Understanding the priorities of the team needs to be well understood by all so that they can all see when things have to change and pre-empt it. A 2015 study by psychologist Gail Matthews showed when people write down their goals, they are 33% more successful in achieving them than those who formulated outcomes in their heads.

Identifying where there are opportunities to collaborate is also more prevalent when there is clarity on who does what to achieve the results. In a 2015 study by Bart de Jong and colleagues, executives said that profitability increases when workers are persuaded to collaborate more and increasingly likely to collaborate when they can see who and what to collaborate on.

“When people write down their goals, they are 33% more successful”



RELATIONSHIPS



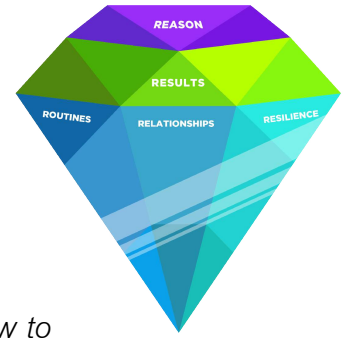
Build the appropriate levels of trust in the team. Ensure diverse opinions and points of view are embraced. Help the team disagree well and overcome conflict.

Teams are the human side of working and how we inter-relate matters enormously. All the models we reviewed and have used in the past focus on the Relationships amongst team members. Trust is frequently the first aspect to be focused on. Relationships are complex and we have identified 6 aspects that contribute to this, based on the research: Communication, Conflict, Trust, Inclusivity, Decision Making and Accountability.

Scientists at MIT Human Dynamics Lab (HBR 21012) found the most important predictors of a team's success were patterns of communication – how (not what) they communicated and interacted had the biggest impact on Results. To be an effective team member, you have to listen to others, and show sensitivity to their feelings and needs. Google's Project Aristotle, which included research into effective teams, found that empathy and taking turns in conversation led to psychological safety, the best predictor of success. In 2016, Bart de Jong and colleagues published a meta-analysis looking into the relationship between trust and team performance. Drawing data from 112 studies, representing over 7,700 teams, this meta-analysis helped resolve the debate and showed that trust does make a difference in teams. De Jong also looked at moderating factors to see if how a team was structured changed the relationship between trust and performance. They found support for a common notion: the greater the interdependence between team members, the more trust is likely to matter. So, the more we work and collaborate together, the more we need to trust each other.

Shannon Marlow, Christina Lacerenza, Jensine Paoletti, Shawn Burke and Eduardo Salas conducted a robust meta-analysis to investigate the link between team communication and performance (2017). This meta-analysis included 150 studies and over 9,000 teams. The main findings confirm that communication may be related to the results the team achieves. It is estimated that in U.S. hospitals, the economic loss due to ineffective team communication reached a staggering \$12 billion per year. Team size is also a critical factor. Many researchers have identified smaller teams - containing less than 10 members - to be more beneficial for team success than larger teams (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Moreland, Levine, & Wingert, 1996). Smaller teams also experience better work-life quality (Campion et al., 1993), work outcomes (Aube et al., 2011), less conflict, stronger communication, more cohesion (Moreland & Levine, 1992; Mathieu et al., 2008). Larger teams will naturally break into small subgroups.

ROUTINES

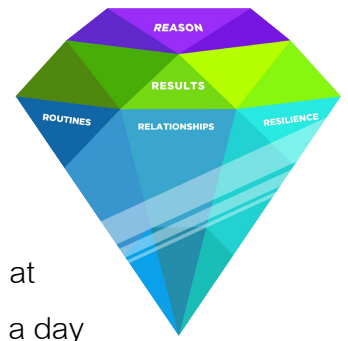


Ensure all of your routines (meetings, ways of working etc) drive all the other dynamics and support high performance rather than interfering with it. Know how to make decisions in your team.

According to the research for Forbes by Erik Larson (2017), teams outperform individual decision makers 66% of the time, and decision making improves as team diversity increases. Compared to individual decision makers, all-male teams make better business decisions 58% of the time, while mixed gender teams do so 73% of the time. Teams that also include a wide range of ages and different geographic locations make better business decisions 87% of the time. The best teams hold themselves accountable. Individuals support and challenge each other to deliver their results (HBR, 2015).

Poor Relationships can also impact behaviours in meetings and in our acceptance of accountabilities. This can often be viewed as passive aggressive behaviours relating to perceived poor performance and lack of accountability in other members. Not having a safe and constructive environment to give each other feedback and support leads to a climate of distrust and poor performance for all. Unproductive meetings and routines can fuel these toxic behaviours. Routines are intrinsically linked, as is Resilience, to achieving positive, powerful Relationships and all three are necessary to deliver the results necessary to achieve the reason.

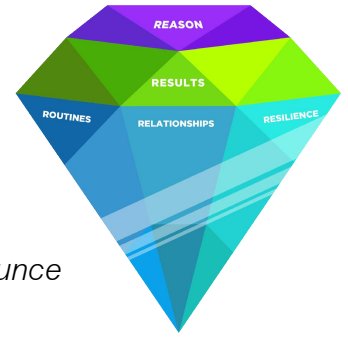
ROUTINES



According to Global Integration (2017), we spend 2 days a week in meetings and at least 50% are unproductive. In terms of emails, we receive on average 70 emails a day and 75% are unnecessary. The routines of emails and meetings and how we communicate, inform and take decisions contribute to the poor productivity of teams. Agile working, with short term focus on sprints and experiments, minimises meetings. Goals are focused and clear to all with results easily measured. Interactive real time collaboration reduces the need for emails and minimises misunderstandings and opportunities for wasted effort. Failures are a way to learn and team members are not bogged down in unnecessary administration.

The High Performing Team we need now must have dynamic routines in place all the time. These need to adjust according to the work, the place in the work cycle the team currently is and the individual members. The leader needs to observe and monitor the team and be prepared to change working practices fast and to challenge them on their results and added value. Identify and create new routines, tools and practices which will add value and support the creation of meaningful collaboration. Steven Kramer found after reviewing the diaries of 278 individuals that “Of all the things that can boost emotions, motivation, and perceptions during a workday, the single most important is making progress in meaningful work. And the more frequently people experience that sense of progress, the more likely they are to be creatively productive in the long run.” (HBR 2011). Extended periods working isolated from home, connecting through virtual platforms and communication with video conference and emails has led to burnout and a level of virtual fatigue. The blurring of work-home routines and environments has caused overload. Trying to maintain traditional face to face routines in the virtual world is unproductive and in many cases not effective. As a short term response many organisations and teams responded well and now as the disruption and uncertainty continues long term many are now recognizing the need to review, adapt and innovate the routines including the boundaries for working from home for the team to be most effective.

RESILIENCE



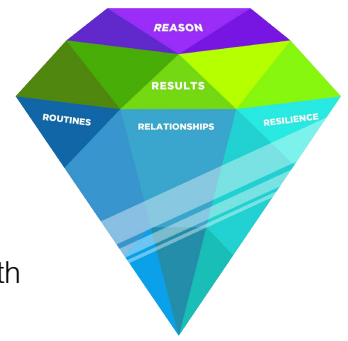
Prepare and anticipate for challenges and adverse events so that your team bounce forward stronger, faster, better than before.

High performing teams have to be resilient to sustain high performance. It is the key reason why teams find it difficult to maintain high levels of performance. Team resilience is also the link for creating and maintaining organisational resilience and individual wellbeing and resilience. Teams are the social group which support individuals and this is a core factor in personal resilience. Resilience is an ability to adapt to the unexpected, to react to setbacks and bounce back, to learn from and build on challenges and failures so that the team can bounce forward better, stronger and wiser.

Teams need to consider 3 stages to resilience: Building, Sustaining, Adapting.

When building resilience, the team needs to prepare, ensuring clarity and alignment on Reason and Results, understanding each other's skills, talents, strengths and weaknesses and having confidence to speak out, challenge and ask for help. Building trust and psychological safety, learning how to challenge and question each other and how to be curious of each others' perspectives is vital. Having a research mindset, which means trying new things so that the team reflects and learns from each other, is also crucial. Using improvisation skills in team meetings enables the team members to get used to building on each others ideas, increases confidence and practice in generating novel solutions. Taking time to work through worst case scenarios and adverse event simulations to build resilience bounce muscles is recommended by Mistry and Rosen (2015).

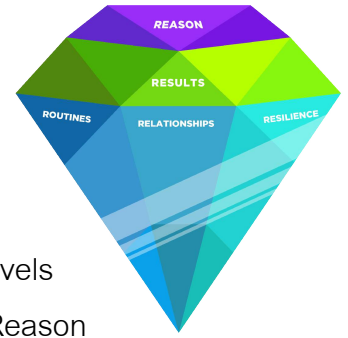
RESILIENCE



In order to sustain performance, according to Sluss and Powley (2020) coping with adverse events and crises requires 2 actions which are: looking after people and broadening perspective. The people aspect involves making sure everyone has the resources they need, encouraging working together and increasing opportunities for collaboration, reframing challenges, managing team energy levels and ensuring the physical, emotional and mental aspects are all supported. In order to maintain perspective, the leaders need to remind the team of the Reason and face down reality and ask lots of questions to understand what is going on. When there is complexity and many unknowns the team needs to edge forwards, asking questions and learning together. The team need to share learning continuously and encourage creativity and future thinking. They should look for opportunities and broaden the team's network. They can bring in external perspectives and encourage helping others, whilst connecting regularly to discuss tasks and relationships.

The third stage: Adapting involves the team reflecting, debriefing each other, raising concerns and appreciating the extra information they are gathering. The team needs to understand what's been working and what has not so that they can then build connections, identify new solutions and paths forward and plan for the future. Interpersonal safety is paramount here as it enables team members to share their weaknesses, failures, ignorance and fears and then also their ideas and opinions. The team needs to hold each other accountable for an inclusive learning environment where everyone is supported and adds value.

RESILIENCE



Resilience is a powerful lever as it sustains individuals and the team to achieve levels of performance they could only dream of. As a result of practising resilience the Reason stays alive and purposeful to all, the Results are clear and exceeded, the Relationships provide strong interpersonal bonds and Routines are effective and relevant and the team continues to sustain High Performance. High performing teams review everything they do regularly to keep ahead of changes in the team. Resilience is about the team and the leader observing and monitoring the team and their context. Teams need to be prepared to change working practices fast and to challenge themselves on their results and added value. They need to identify and create new practices which will add value and support the creation of meaningful collaboration.

Resilience is something teams need to monitor all the time because teams are dynamic and ever changing. As people leave and new people join, the dynamics in the team change. As customer needs change, the team needs to adapt to meet their new requirements. As the organisation changes, the team needs to be agile enough to keep up. It's important to adjust and adapt to maintain high performance.

Consider the Progress Principle: "Of all the things that can boost emotions, motivation, and perceptions during a workday, the single most important is making progress in meaningful work. And the more frequently people experience that sense of progress, the more likely they are to be creatively productive in the long run." (HBR 2011)

CONCLUSION

The results of High Performing Teams are impressive and worth pursuing both from an organisational results perspective and also in terms of the benefits the individual receives. Teams are Dynamic and ever-changing, just like the environment in which they operate. The leader and the team members need to work together to review and diagnose how they are doing and continually make small adjustments to move towards higher performance. The framework of The Dynamics of High Performing teams provides a language and toolset to express the needs of the team and actions leaders and teams can take to improve. Dynamic and High Performing Teams will always be a work in progress by their very nature and yet will also be very satisfying and motivating to be a part of and to lead.



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Tel: +44 (0)333 987 5072

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