

High Performing Teams

By Dr Stephen Brown



The quest for high performance is pervasive. Commentary abounds on how individuals, teams and organisations are achieving. An ability to collaborate is identified as a necessary 'enterprise skill' or disposition that all young people will require to effectively engage in the 'work of work' and the future (Foundation for Young Australians, 2016, 2017). Humans by our very nature are 'hardwired' to live and experience each other in communities, organisations and families (O'Keeffe, 2011). Organisations' at their core are a manifestation of human behaviours that express as culture. Teamwork is deemed to be a positive indicator of a high performing organisation.

What makes a high performing team? An extraordinary amount of research, opinion and leadership development activity has and continues to focus on this question.

In 2017 Google conducted an extensive research study on their teams and organisational teamwork (Re: work-google, 2017). The study noted the dynamics of effective teams as:

1. Psychological Safety: team members feel safe to take risks and be vulnerable in front of each other.
2. Dependability: team members get things done on time and meet Google's high bar for excellence.
3. Structure and Clarity: team members have clear roles, plans and goals.
4. Meaning: work personally is important to team members and;
5. Impact: team members think their work matters and creates change.

These findings and characteristics align with other studies of note on high performing workplace teams.

Wageman, Nunes, Burruss and Hackman (2008) in their extensive study of senior leadership teams noted that there are six conditions for senior leadership team effectiveness, three 'essentials' and the other three 'enablers'. The 'essentials' are creating a real team rather than one in name only;

developing a clear and compelling purpose and having team members who have the right mix of skills, experience and capabilities (2008, p.15). The enablers for successful team work and ongoing development are team coaching, the generation of a supportive context and a solid structure (2008, p.14).

Lencioni's (2002) seminal work on the five dysfunctions of a team affirms and aligns with the identified team effectiveness characteristics; absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability and inattention to results.

Such research provides an excellent base from which to reflect on the teams, their practices and the behaviour of the individuals who form them. It should be remembered that high performing teams do not occur naturally, they are consciously and systematically built and designed by leaders in collaboration with their workforce. (Strategic Momentum, 2005-2006).

This is the first in a series of articles by Dr Stephen Brown on high performing teams. Subsequent articles will examine in depth some of the essential characteristics of team effectiveness.

Dr Brown is Director of The Brown Collective and works nationally and internationally with a range of sectors, schools and executives, building and enhancing teams and teamwork. The Brown Collective is a global group of thought leaders and advisers dedicated to enhancing the performance of individuals, teams and whole organisations. Committed to making a meaningful impact for future generations, The Brown Collective is a known and trusted voice in every sector needing expertise in policy and strategy, capacity-building and sustainable change.

References:

Foundation for Young Australians, 2016, Enterprise skills and careers education in schools. Why Australia needs a national strategy.

Foundation for Young Australians, 2017, The New Basics: Big data reveals the skills young people need for the New Work Order.

O'Keeffe,A, 2011, Hardwired Humans, Roundtable Press, NSW.

Strategic Momentum,2005-2006, The Critical Steps to Building a High-Performance Team.

Re: work - google , 2017.

Wageman, R, Nunes, D, Burrus, J and Hackman, R, 2008, Senior Leadership Teams. What it takes to make them great. Harvard Business School Press. Boston.