human interest

2019 annual

insights

Contents

Dear Friends,

Welcome to our 2019 Insights. During the course of the year, our articles have focussed on the 15 characteristics of an Elite Team. We have structured this publication according to our Elite Team Profile and have divided it into three sections, what we like to call Pillars; namely Shapers, Drivers and Accelerators.

During the course of the year, we have had the opportunity to partner with many teams as the actively work towards reaching their potential. We have refined our team transformation process and added significant depth to our quantitative analysis – all to facilitate rich conversations on team dynamics and what a team has to either leverage or remove to achieve greatness.

We were honoured to present at a number of conferences across Southern Africa, and relished the opportunity to engage with HR Leaders on how to run internal HR functions like stand alone Consulting firms. Prompting them to answer a key question: Would they buy from themselves?

We wish you all the best for 2020 and look forward to continued conversations on how to move the performance dial through the power of people.

Janko Kotzé

Managing Director
Human Interest

human interest

your people — our interest

Our service offering

Elite Team Development

Our Elite Team™ assessment and programme shape your employees into high-performing teams.

Leadership Development

Our Elite Leader™ Profile facilitates fast-tracked growth for the contemporary business leader

Organisation Design

Co-create fit-for-purpose organisation structures to reach strategic goals.

Talent Management

Harness the power of the employee experience to recruit, develop and retain top talent.

Custom Learning Programmes

Construct and implement made-to-measure learning programmes to empower each individual in your workforce.

Change Management

Accelerate enduring agility to secure the survival of the organisation, with your workforce as driving agents.

Succession Planning

Develop future leaders and build a pipeline to feed critical, or lynchpin, positions.

Organisational Diagnosis

Assess the overall health of the business to address gaps in culture, climate and engagement levels.

Culture Transformation

Foster the desired corporate culture at multiple levels.

Coaching

Tailored, one-on-one coaching programmes which empower individuals to reach their full potential, both professionally and personally.

Human Resources Transformation

Recalibrate the Human Resources function from a service provider to a strategic business partner.

Bespoke Masterclasses

Tailored masterclasses presented as practical workshops to elevate employee engagement and align your team's output with business objectives.

Insights

Shapers

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An Elite Team revolves around a pinpointed purpose

In the new world of work, the organisational structure is rapidly transforming from a top-down, hierarchical approach to an inclusive and team-based style. A leading research report strongly suggests that shifting towards a team-based model significantly improves organisational performance.

High-performing companies have taken the team paradigm one step further by operating as a network of teams: participants move from team to team rather than remaining in static formal configurations.

High-performing – or Elite – teams channel their energy to create superb synergy. The collective ability of the team transcends each member's capacity as they overtake their rivals and outperform in anticipated productivity. Team members are well aware of the fact that they are more likely to reach their full potential by being part of this Elite Team.

High-performing teams are ignited – and driven – by purpose.

If high performing companies are the product of a network of Elite Teams – where participants can move seamlessly from one role to the next – leadership need to embed a strong sense of team-based thinking. No team can succeed without a well-defined purpose. If the purpose is not clear, the team will falter. An Elite Team, however, is both ignited and driven by its purpose.

For them, purpose is shorthand for their raison d'être, the most crucial reason for the team's existence. Purpose aligns energy, drives interdependence and pushes performance. It is from purpose that mutually agreed-upon goals are derived, roles are defined, and strategies are developed.

Indeed, one research report defines Elite Teams as "fertile settings for understanding how front-runners of human systems engage in what is called 'purposing' – a continuous stream of actions that has the effect of inducing clarity, consensus, and commitment."

The research paper, titled *The purposing of high-performing systems*, underlines the critical role of the leader in defining and maintaining a clear sense of purpose among all system members. The team leader ensures that the team, as well as outside stakeholders, is clear about the team's objective. The leader highlights the importance of the team's work and cultivates a passion towards the purpose.

When the team leader distinctly clarifies purpose and underlines that their strengths are recognised, the team builds a sense of trust towards each other.

A 2019 global study of engagement from the ADP Research Institute® found that trust in team leaders is the foundation of engagement.

The purposing of high-performing systems highlights three fundamental characteristics associated with such leaders.

The critical role of the leader of high-performing teams in establishing purpose.

One of the notable personal qualities of leaders of Elite Teams is the willingness to invest large amounts of time in the system. This time investment is not limited to hour-to-hour or day-to-day time but also includes the sense of a year-to-year – and even decade-to-decade – timeline.

Another outstanding personal quality of a leader at the helm of a high-performing team is the ability to develop and express deep sentiments about the team, its purposes, the people in it, its history, and its future.

The leader also has the aptitude to focus on the various issues in the system that truly make a difference to the team's performance. These matters are not limited to the inner workings of the group. The leader also monitors the external environment.

As such, companies aiming to be at the top of their game need to embed Elite Team thinking not only internally but also in the broader ecosystem in which today's social enterprise exists.

A social enterprise, as Deloitte defines it, is an organisation which mission combines revenue growth and profit-making with the need to respect and preserve its environment and stakeholder network.

How purpose outshines profit-making.

The 2014 Deloitte Core Beliefs & Culture Survey found that focusing on purpose rather than profits builds business confidence and drives investment.

Respondents described companies that ascribed to this philosophy as 'social enterprise.' The study reported that 91% of respondents (executives and employees) who said their company had a strong sense of purpose also said their company had a history of strong financial performance.

Purpose cultivates reassurance among leaders and stakeholders alike – and can lead to a competitive advantage in a time of economic volatility.

Additionally, personal experience and engagement are critical factors in the transformation towards social enterprise. Aligning personal purpose with organisational purpose is the primary driver of high-performing organisations in terms of employee experience. Personal experience is also defined by the meaning participants derive from their work and emotion connected to the larger purpose of the team.

A recent study revealed that employees would give up a part of their remuneration to experience a sense of purpose. In the survey, conducted among 3,500 professionals in the UK, 49% of respondents who wanted to leave their current employers said that they would give up part of their compensation to stay in their position with an added sense of purpose.

In a survey conducted by *Workhuman Research Institute*, 32% of responders answered, "My job – I find the work meaningful," when asked why they stay at their company.

When team members find personal purpose in their corporate objectives, the right psychological boxes are ticked. Participants feel their work is meaningful, which speaks to what drives them to be successful.

In Daniel Pink's New York Times Bestseller, *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*, he identifies that our desire for purpose – the ambition to contribute to something of importance and meaning – is one of the crucial elements that drive human behaviour and the need to achieve.

The value of purpose-driven leadership

In line with Simon Sinek's *Start with Why*, very few people know "why they do what they do" – the foundation behind the cause, purpose, belief and why the organisation exists. In order to be successful, Sinek regards it as paramount to work from the inside out. Inspired and successful leaders think and communicate following on Sinek's Golden Circle, starting from "Why" before moving on to the "How" and "What".

From purpose to engagement to performance.

This drive to be successful, in turn, sparks engagement. Engagement is the precursor of consistent performance. According to Forbes, companies with a highly engaged culture perform better, with higher stock prices, higher productivity, lower turnover, and greater customer satisfaction.

For organisations that have adopted a team approach, the prognosis for continuous engagement is even better.

The 2019 global study of engagement from the ADP Research Institute® found that if employees consider themselves as part of a team (or even better, part of more than one team), they are twice as likely to feel engaged in their task. This holds true regardless of demographics, work status, or where they work.

The ADP Research Institute® report says that 84% of employees worldwide are merely 'coming to work' instead of contributing to their full potential. In terms of Global Engagement, only about 16 % of employees are 'fully engaged.'

However, the study also underlines that when companies make high-performing teams their primary focus – including what creates them and what can fracture them – they can expect to see more significant rises in Global Engagement.

Executive Coach Gordon Tredgold sums it up by saying that high performance starts with employee engagement. Engagement is not possible without an accessible organisational (or team) purpose. Organisational purpose needs to align with personal purpose to ensure long-term buy-in.

On the topic of purpose at work, leadership specialist professor Karl Moore says, "people often say 'It's business, it's not personal.' Well, it's time we retire this worn-out cliché. In order for one to perform in a business or a non-profit organisation, it must be somewhat personal."

Source: The Golden Circle from Simon Sinek's Start with Why

Knowing and communicating "the why behind the what" in everything we do not only creates higher motivation and engagement in your employees but also buy-in from your customers.

It is easy to see how professionals in healthcare and education find it rather effortless to find their jobs as meaningful. It is not uncommon to assume that workers in "dirty work" occupations or jobs that are stigmatised as messy, unpleasant or undignified would be disengaged. In a study by sociologists, it was found that workers in these industries are able to transcend their trivial job roles and bad working conditions, finding their jobs meaningful and rewarding. These people regard their jobs as more than just a career or source of income; they have a genuine belief that their work contributes towards a greater good that makes the world a better place. They are able to make a strong connection between how "The mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important".

Sinek argues that there are two types of leaders. Those who decide to manipulate to get to the end result, and those who start with the end result in mind and let everything else naturally fall into place. Purpose-driven leaders are likely to inspire purpose-driven employees. A recent study found that, when leaders are connected to a personally meaningful purpose, employees are more likely to connect to a higher purpose as well.

"Why" type leaders are visionaries with overactive imaginations. They tend to be optimists who believe that everything they can imagine can be accomplished and they tend to be focused on things most people cannot see, like the future. "How" type leaders are more practical and more realistic, they tend to be focused on the things most people can see and tend to be better at building them. Interestingly, Sinek says that "How" type leaders can be very successful but they rarely build billion-dollar businesses that change the world.

Effective leaders provide clarity to the mission and how individuals contribute which makes it more actionable. Not only do leaders need to showcase their values and purpose by making it visible within the company, they also need to reinforce them in their day-to-day behaviours with the right organisational culture and support structures. Leaders, who are able to articulate company values clearly, set the right tone from the top down. Great leaders do not only translate the organisation's mission and purpose into language that everyone can understand, they also create engagement by showing how everyday tasks link to the overall organisational strategy.

Instill a higher purpose to increase financial performance

A study conducted in 2016 aimed to assess 500 000 employees' perceptions regarding their organisations' corporate purpose. Results indicated that there are two types of high-purpose organisations:

1) Organisations characterised by high togetherness between employees; and

2) Organisations characterised by high clarity from management.

Results indicated that organisations exhibiting both high purpose and clarity had systematically higher future operating financial performance and return on assets, even after controlling for current performance.

When the current CEO of USA-owned electric services company, DTE Energy, Gerard Anderson, began in his position, he did not believe in the power of high organisational purpose. It is important to state that organisational purpose is not the same as an organisation's mission that focuses on how the organisation will be successful financially.

Organisational purpose is aspirational and encapsulates how employees are making a difference.

Unfortunately, as seen with Anderson, many leaders do not believe that organisational purpose belongs with the economic aspects of an organisation. Once the Recession in 2008 hit, Anderson realised he needed more commitment from his employees. Unfortunately, prior to this event, surveys had shown that the workforce was already largely disengaged.

It was at this time that Joe Robles, the then CEO of United Services Automobile Association (USAA),

invited Anddderson to come and see the USAA call centres. Expecting to see people simply going through the motions of their everyday work, he was shocked to find positive and fully engaged employees. When Anderson asked how this could be, Robles answered that a leader's most important job is "to connect the people to their purpose".

Robles explained that all employees underwent an intense four-day cultural orientation and that lessons were continually reinforced through different platforms. These platforms enabled employees to ask questions and share ideas about how they can fulfil their purpose.

Upon his return to DTE, Anderson made a video articulating his employees' higher purpose. The first group of people to watch the video gave a standing ovation and some were moved to tears. Never before had their work been framed as a meaningful contribution to the greater good. DTE's leaders dedicated themselves to supporting that purpose. As employees perceived

the purpose to be authentic, a transformation began to take place. Engagement scores increased and DTE received a Gallup Great Workplace Award for five years in a row. Financial performance also improved with DTE's stock price more than tripling from the end of 2008 to the end of 2017.

This case study sheds a lot of light and reflects the mindsets of so many leaders. If you apply only economic logic, you start to perceive your employees as self-interested agents, and design practices accordingly.

Many executives avoid working on their organisations' purpose. Why is this? Because it defies what they have been taught in business schools and through experience: that work is largely done by the book and that employees will exert the least effort possible. Results have shown how, although a higher purpose does not guarantee economic benefits, it has a positive impact on both financial and employee performance.

Creating or finding a purpose?

For organisations striving to create elite teams and an engaged workforce, the most important thing is to ensure that groups of people and individuals have a clear sense of purpose. With a strong sense of purpose – the "why" – in place, organisations will benefit in the long run through increased employee engagement and collaboration, as well as enhanced individual and organisational performance.

The importance of *purpose* is further highlighted when you consider the eighth item of Gallup's Q12 Employee Engagement Survey: "the mission or purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important".

The Deloitte 2017 Global Human Capital Trends report found that most millennials look beyond an organisation's financial performance when deciding whether or not to work there. Only one in five respondents said they would choose to stay at a solely profit-driven company for more than five years.

Mark Twain once said: "The two most important days in your life are the day you are born and the day you find out why." This articulation of purpose is not truly reflective of everyday life, but rather suggests we are all moving through life until fate delivers a higher calling to us.

Although this can happen, it is extremely rare. For the average employee in an unfulfilling job, searching for what gives life meaning is likely to end with frustration. When searching for professional purpose, most people have to focus as much on making their work meaningful as in taking meaning from it. In other words, **purpose is a thing you build, not a thing you find**.

Unfortunately, a recent study conducted by LinkedIn reported that 49% of employees would trade a portion of their salary to continue in their current role for an "added sense of purpose". The study also revealed that these purpose-driven professionals prove to be extremely valuable talent.

The importance of purpose in a team should also not be overlooked.

Team purpose is useful when deciding whether a team should commit. When a team has a defined purpose, it can more easily decide whether it is "in" (committed) or "out" (choosing not to take on the work). If the team can agree on its purpose with its stakeholders, it provides a helpful guideline to your team and others in your company.

Team purpose can also provide role clarity. Without a team purpose, it is more likely that a team will perform work without taking on the formal responsibility for it. In other words, the team has not formally committed but is still doing the work. Team purpose gives a team's stakeholders a clear definition of the role of the team which, in turn, drives the workload. Team purpose therefore tells your team what their priorities are and allows them to remain accountable to their commitments. When you commit to your team, you are more likely to put more effort into completing the work, because you will be taking responsibility for the outcome.
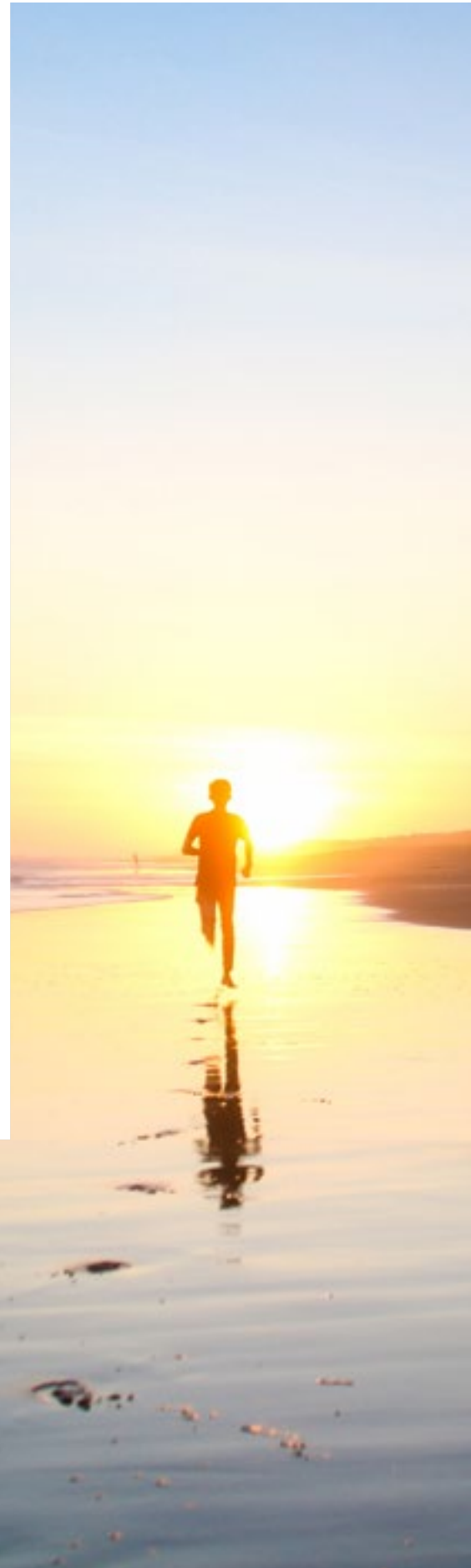
Using the concept of "Grit" to drive goal achievement

"Ever tried. Ever failed. No Matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better." - Samuel Beckett

Angela Duckworth was in her late twenties, working as a management consultant when she decided to leave her demanding job and teach maths at a New York public school. What she observed in the classroom led her to pursue a degree in psychology. She noted that some children worked much harder and longer than others. Duckworth wanted to know *why*. What she found after studying many different groups of people is that intellectual talent was not the defining factor between the best and worst performers but, rather, what emerged as a significant predictor of success was *"grit"*.

In psychology, grit is a trait based on an individual's **perseverance** of effort combined with the **passion** for a particular long-term goal. It is the tendency to sustain interest in and effort toward very long-term goals – which Duckworth believes to be the hallmark of high achievers in every domain.

Thus, grit is living life as a marathon rather than a sprint. Grit serves as the overriding factor that provides the endurance required to "push through" amid challenges and setbacks. Grit, unlike many traditional measures of performance, is not tied to intelligence. Duckworth suggested that this helps explain why some very intelligent individuals do not consistently perform well over long periods. You cannot have grit without a goal.

Duckworth provides an alternative framework to structuring long-term goals and their attainment. According to Duckworth, grit is about holding the same top-level goal for a very long time.
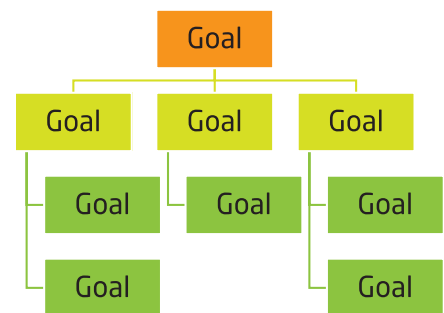
Visualise your goal setting as a hierarchy with multiple levels, be it work-related or personal.

The low-level goals are your day-to-day actions like writing emails, going to meetings, jogging for an hour, reading etc. We do these goals as a means to an end of a higher-level goal – such as executing a project. The higher the goal in this hierarchy, the more abstract, general and important it is. Waking up at 5AM is a low-level goal as it only matters because of a mid-level goal, arriving at work on time.

The ultimate goal is what should drive every action at lower levels. If an activity does not fit strongly within your goal hierarchy, then it likely is not moving you closer to your goal and maybe you should stop. For example, you might find that spending an hour answering emails is not actually helping you make real progress on your project, which then is not driving you toward your goal.

Furthermore, the low-level goals are not to be held sacred. If you fail on a low-level goal, another can take its place. If you find a new low-level goal that is more effective and feasible, you can swap it out for another.
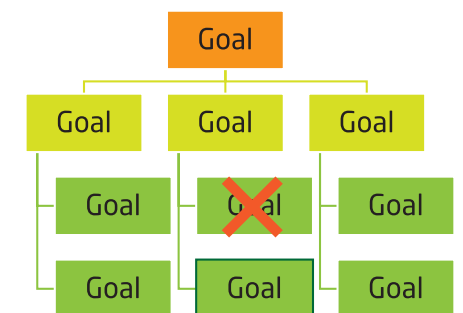
When well-constructed, a goal hierarchy promotes grit. If all your activities are in pursuit of your highest-level goal, then your everyday activities apply effort toward your goal.

A good way to start is to complete the Warren Buffett prioritisation exercise.

1 Write down your top 25 goals (work-related or personal) on a single piece of paper.
2 Circle only your top five priorities.
3 Put the top five on one list and the remaining 20 on a second list (these are your distractors).

This exercise will allow for a more focused view of prioritised goals.

A managers' guide to goal setting dos and don'ts

High-performing managers create simple goals, make sure they are clear and transparent, and revisit them regularly. Google, for example, uses an agile goal-setting process called OKR (objectives and key results) which was originally developed at Intel.

The process is simple and effective: Each individual (from CEO down) sets ambitious and measurable objectives, and are asked to define "key results" that monitor their progress. Everyone's OKRs are public, so, it's easy to see for what the CEO or your peer is holding himself or herself accountable. At Google, this creates alignment because employees can see who is dependent on their work. People feel comfortable that they know what to do, they see what others are working on and the measurement of their performance is clear.

Extensive research also found a substantial impact on business outcomes when employees feel vested in their goals and senior leaders create an environment of accountability for goal achievement.

To help organisations turn the principles of effective goal-setting and management into action, Deloitte research identified the following high-impact dos:

- Simplify goals by limiting the number of goals and ensuring they are SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound);
- Clarify the goal-setting process;
- Enable a platform where goals can be communicated and shared;
- Increase employees' goal-setting capabilities by allowing them to set their own goals;
- Review and adapt goals frequently – at least quarterly;
- Connect goal-setting and career planning by ensuring goals are integrated with increased learning; and
- Link individual goals to business objectives to demonstrate how the individual goals fit into the big picture.

There are unfortunately many don'ts to take into consideration, especially if you are a manager responsible for assisting employees with setting goals. We explore three below:

- **Being too rigid or too flexible:** An important distinction needs to be made regarding *setting* and *pursuing* goals. When *setting* goals that are rigid, it limits any chance for future change. This can be demotivating, especially considering that people are generally quite poor at predicting future actions or behaviours. However, setting out specific steps to follow in order to *pursue* the goal increases the likelihood that the goal will be achieved. This insight sheds light on a dilemma often faced by leaders and managers, who have the responsibility for setting and monitoring goals. Too often, a leader sets goals and then gives autonomy to teams to achieve them.
- **Being over-prescriptive with goals:** With goals, people narrow their focus. This intense focus can blind people to important issues that appear unrelated to their goal. The tendency to focus too narrowly on goals is compounded when managers chart the wrong course by setting the wrong goal. Consistent with the classic notion that you get what you reward, goal setting may cause people to ignore important dimensions of performance that are not specified by the goal-setting system. Goals inform the individual about what behaviour is valued and appropriate.
- **Being too challenging:** Research has shown that people motivated by specific and challenging goals adopt riskier strategies and take riskier chances than do those with less challenging goals. People naturally want to achieve their goals. Thus, a potential side-effect of setting goals that are too challenging is that people may engage in overly risky or even unethical behaviour to achieve the goals, possibly to detrimental effect.

Setting goals...and achieving them

Perhaps you have heard of the Yale or Harvard Business School study of goals in which only 3% of the graduating class had specific written goals for their futures. Twenty years later, that 3% was found to be earning an astounding ten times that of the group that had no clear goals. However, it turns out that this study never existed and was made up to emphasise the importance of goal setting.

A link has been shown between effective goal-setting, management processes and business outcomes. Creating a clear connection between employees' work and the organisation's goals is also a key driver of employee engagement levels. Goal setting, however, is a challenge. According to research conducted by Deloitte, only 51% of organisations even attempt to develop aligned goals and, among these, only 6% regularly revisit them. Too many organisations write down annual goals and only look at them at the end of the year. This research found that organisations that revisit goals quarterly have threefold greater improvement in performance and retention than those that revisit goals yearly.

Teams that are engaged in reaching goals see a 28% higher same-year operating margin, yet, a mere 7% of employees understand what they actually need to do to help their organisation reach its goals. Further, while more than half (51%) of senior leaders convene a series of meetings throughout the year to discuss goals with business leaders, only 6% of those business leaders use the same engaging approach to communicate goals to their direct reports, including team and middle managers. **The simple truth is that your team cannot achieve a goal it does not know about.**

The abovementioned non-existent study prompted a study conducted by a psychology professor at the Dominican University in California. A total of 149 participants from different countries and in a variety of different professions participated in the study. Participants were randomly assigned to one of five conditions all with variations, including and excluding writing down goals, creating actions, sharing actions with a friend and providing progress reports regarding actions to a friend.

At the end of the study, only 43% of Group 1 (did not write down any goals) either accomplished their goals or were at least halfway there. Sixty-two per cent of Group 4 (wrote down goals and shared actions with a friend) accomplished their goals or were at least halfway there. However, 76% of those in Group 5 (wrote down goals and provided progress reports regarding actions with a friend) either accomplished their goals or were at least halfway there.

What the findings showed was that the group of subjects who reaped the best results (Group 5) followed a specific model:

- **Commitment to action:** Rather than simply writing down a goal, the group was asked to commit to an action by partaking in a thorough thought process. Essentially, they were making a commitment, on paper, to achieve their goal.
- **Accountability to peers:** This group had to follow up their concrete goal planning and action commitment by enlisting another person. They needed to send their commitment to a peer, making them more accountable.
- **Regular updates:** This group had to update their friend or accountability person on a weekly basis, which kept them focused on their progress.

When the above three factors are included in goal-setting, the results are shown to be positive.

The necessity of role clarity in teams

Role ambiguity is one of the greatest sources of stress. Though easily fixed, it is an ongoing issue for many teams.

A study looking at numerous organisations was conducted and assessed them against different aspects of successful teams. One such organisation was the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The three teams that were observed were responsible for the radio and television broadcasts of special events (such as the 2006 World Cup) and daytime television shows. These teams were large, ranging from 66 to 133 people, all from different disciplines. One would be forgiven for believing that there was a strong possibility of confusion among team members.

To the contrary, it was found that the BBC's teams scored among the highest in the sample with regard to the clarity with which team members viewed their own roles and the roles of others. All three teams were composed of specialists who had expertise in their given function, and each person had a clearly defined role. The tasks the BBC teams tackle are, by their very nature, uncertain and to some extent ambiguous, particularly when they involve covering breaking news. The BBC has overcome this by clarifying team members' individual roles with so much precision that it keeps friction, internal competition and the possibility of mistakes to a minimum.

The research showed that collaboration improves when the roles of individual team members are clearly defined and well understood. Without such clarity, team members are likely to waste too much energy negotiating roles or protecting their domain rather than focusing on the required tasks.

Role clarity is a prerequisite for effective team performance. When team members know what is expected of them, which aspects of their role are most important, how the delivery of that role contributes to team goals and how their performance will be evaluated, the team as a whole will perform to a higher level of effectiveness.

However, it is not just a case of individual role clarity. Each team member must also be clear on the roles of all other team members. This requires regular discussion between the team and team leader, with the leader ensuring that all team members, individually and collectively, understand their own and each other's roles.

Leaders often incorrectly believe that the problems can be solved by each individual having a job description. A job description, however, does not necessarily define an individual's role in a team.

An effective leader will not simply define the roles on paper and hand them out. They will explain the role and ensure that its purpose and deliverables are clearly understood in a broad context. Effective leaders will ensure that the expectations of each role are understood by both the "role-owner" and by the other team members. They will also accept that maintaining role clarity is an ongoing leadership activity.

Role ambiguity is one of the greatest barriers to team effectiveness. Teams with role clarity are substantially more successful than those without. It takes a strong team leader to recognise its importance and create the processes to ensure it is an ongoing activity for the team.

Defining roles and unpacking responsibilities to empower your team towards exceptional performance

'When no one is responsible for something, it doesn't get done.' - Justin Rosenstein

True teamwork has never been a simple task, but in recent years, it has become even more multifaceted. As teams are becoming more global, virtual, and project-driven, leadership needs to be at the top of their game to clarify roles and communicate responsibilities.

Duplication of effort and confusion around responsibilities can increase frustration and stress, and potentially create conflict in teams, says Professor Beverly Alimo-Metcalfe from the Real World Group.

A network of teams replaces organograms.

Putting the 21st-century business under the spotlight, a growing number of leading companies are reworking their business structure. The traditional hierarchical organogram is making way for teamwork. Microsoft, for instance, says that their workforce is on twice as many teams as they were five years ago.

Businesses are reinventing themselves to operate as interactive networks of teams to stay ahead of the challenges associated with a VUKA (Volatile, Uncertain, Complex and Ambiguous) environment.

New technologies help businesses extend participation on projects to an ever-growing number of contributors, allowing companies to tap into a wide variety of knowledge and expertise.

Within the fluid matrix of a network of teams, the possible combinations of participants are endless. As a team reaches their objective and dissolves, newly available members slot into existing units (or coagulate into new teams entirely). As such, the possibility grows exponentially to solve business problems because members organise themselves into novel clusters of potential.

However, the fluidity of this interconnected network of teams implies that roles and responsibilities are not rigid. Leadership needs to take firm control of communicating expectations and objectives associated with *each* role.

Role definition affects the team's potential and performance.

Roles must be clearly defined and congruent with each assignee's abilities. Role description must be exhaustive and cover all tasks and objectives. The key to tapping into the inherent synergy of the team is precise task delegation, based on various strengths of its members.

A 2013 study of interconnected and multidisciplinary teams found that in-depth role clarity had a marked positive influence on the quality of team outcomes and an overall improvement in performance as well as on interpersonal wellbeing.

Role ambiguity is one of the most noteworthy barriers to team effectiveness. Unfortunately, many a manager confuses role clarity with job descriptions. For most employees, a job description is a document against which they were recruited. However, a job description seldom defines role responsibility in an in-depth way.

A document cannot replace a synergistic discussion between the leader and the participant. Nor can it replace interaction between the members of the team. Comprehensive and continuous unpacking of a participant's responsibilities should happen in person within a trusting environment.

Role clarity is a prerequisite for effective team performance in general. To take a team from good to great, however, leaders would need to do more than merely describe functions and duties. Each participant needs to have a clear grasp of his or her roles and responsibilities in achieving the shared purpose. Each contributor must also have a detailed understanding of the functions of all other team members and how the parts interconnect with each other.

In defining roles, Elite Teams ascribe to a collective model of teamwork.

To elevate a team from a great team to a high-performing – or Elite – unit, the collective need to share a mutual mental model of teamwork. A research quartet, led by Professor of Leadership Bradley Kirkman, found that this shared phycological agreement of what defines teamwork sets high-performing teams apart from good-enough and mediocre teams.

The collective model of teamwork states that, over and above the fact that team members must understand their own roles and responsibilities (as well as those of their colleagues), participants should also have a clear plan on interacting with each other during adversity or external role conflict.

Team members also need to agree on which tasks take priority in which scenario, as quick-changing circumstances may dictate a change of team priorities.

Even with unlimited potential, the team will still have to make do with limited resources. Colleagues need to agree on allocated resources for each task.

Resources are not limited to budget but also include facilities, support staff, equipment, software and time distribution. Leadership should decisively communicate the team's decision-making control over resource allocation. In the same spirit, leaders should also be clear about the team's decision-making mandate.

When participants are uncertain about decision-making protocol, they feel unsure about the next step, which affects their self-confidence and engagement. The hesitation of one person in the unit may hinder the progression of the entire team.

Teams must be able to identify problems and opportunities, evaluate their options for moving forward, and then make necessary trade-offs and decisions about how to proceed.

Undoubtedly, the team needs to address pressing matters which might evoke conflict or stir emotion. Team members, therefore, need psychological safety as a prerequisite to coordinate group-dynamic, predict one another's behaviour and make decisions collectively on the fly.

When boiled down to the essence, the team's mental model entails two factors: accuracy (are we taking the correct action at the right time?) and collective approval (do we all agree on what we need to do?)

When Elite Team members share a concrete understanding of what needs to be done and how their roles — and the roles of others — fit into the big picture, they are well-positioned to respond to adversity effectively, and without hesitation. This confidence, in turn, cultivates cooperation and promotes team cohesion.

The cascading effect of diligent role definition.

Cohesion is a state in which members maintain bonds that link them to one another or the entire unit. Cohesive units don't happen by chance – it takes skilled leadership and team persistence. Team networks with a high degree of cohesion provide a free stream of information and build trust amongst participants, which increases collaboration, which, in turn, improves performance.

Research has shown that, when a team perceives a task as one that requires creativity and implicit or explicit permission to not go along with groupthink, its members are more likely to invest more time and energy in collaboration.

Defining roles and responsibilities might seem like a humdrum task. However, genuinely investing time and brainpower in this seemingly routine undertaking often has a cascading effect on the performance status of the entire team.

Foster role clarity to meet the human brain's requirements

Deep work: A necessity for quality execution

Science has proven that not having clearly defined roles and responsibilities can have the same effect on a person as being physically threatened and will activate that area in the brain.

In today's digital age, distractions are ever present. They come in the form of emails, social media and distracting thoughts. This becomes even more of an issue when the distractions are so attractive. Email taps into our primal impulse to seek out random rewards, resulting in addictive behaviour. In addition, social media is designed to captivate.

Neuroscience posits that "the fundamental organising principle of the brain is to minimise danger and maximise reward." (Evian Gordon)

The SCARF model, developed by David Rock, involves five domains of human social experience.

The model is built on three central ideas:

1   The brain treats many social threats and rewards with the same intensity as physical threats and rewards;
2   The capacity to make decisions, solve problems and collaborate with others is generally reduced by a threat response and increased under a reward response; and
3   The threat response is more intense and more common, and often needs to be carefully minimised in social interactions.

SCARF stands for the five key "domains" that influence our behaviour in social situations.

■ **Status** – our relative importance to others.
■ **Certainty** – our ability to predict the future.
■ **Autonomy** – our sense of control over events.
■ **Relatedness** – how safe we feel with others.
■ **Fairness** – how fair we perceive the exchanges between people to be.

The model is based on neuroscience research that implies that these five social domains activate the same threat and reward responses in our brain that we rely on for physical survival. These five domains activate either the "primary reward" or "primary threat" circuitry of the brain.

One domain that directly relates to role and responsibility clarity is that of "Certainty". When there are constantly changing goals and unclear expectations, a threat response is triggered.

In a state of threat, the prefrontal cortex – with its conscious and controlled thinking processes – is effectively shut down by the significantly stronger forces of the limbic system. The limbic system manages stress for safety and survival. Activation of the limbic system results in feelings of anxiety, fear, frustration, being out of control and negativity. The stress hormones, cortisol and noradrenaline, flood the system and have been shown to compromise performance outcomes.

When there are clear roles and expectations, a reward response is triggered. The prefrontal cortex is active and associated feelings of optimism, well-being, greater intuition and a heightened learning state result. The hormone dopamine is released – commonly referred to as the "feel-good hormone".

Clarity is important. A person's brain uses fewer resources in familiar situations than unfamiliar ones. Working with a lack of clarity can increase a person's stress levels and impair their ability to make effective and balanced decisions.

On average, employees who do the majority of their work on computers are distracted once every ten and a half minutes. Twenty-three percent of those interruptions come from email but the biggest source of interruptions, by far, come from the individuals themselves. Voluntarily switching from one task to the next without finishing the original task first accounts for a full 44% of work interruptions.

In a 2009 study called *"Why Is It So Hard to Do My Work?",* it was discovered that attention acts more like syrup than water. You can redirect it, but a sticky "attention residue" stays behind, fixed to the last task you were working on. That residue is particularly thick when you do not complete one task before moving on to the next one. But, even when you do manage to finish the first task, your attention continues to stay fractured. People experiencing attention residue after switching tasks are likely to demonstrate poor performance on that next task. The thicker the residue, the worse the performance.

According to Cal Newport, two types of work exist:

1   *Shallow work:* Non-cognitively intensive tasks which are low-value and easy to replicate, like responding to emails, scanning websites and using social media.
2   *Deep work:* Activities performed in a state of distraction-free concentration that push your cognitive capabilities to their limits.

Deep work is hard and shallow work is easier and, in the presence of so many distractions, the visible

How to enable deep work

Deep work can provide individuals and teams with a competitive advantage because it enables high-quality work to be produced in shorter periods of time.
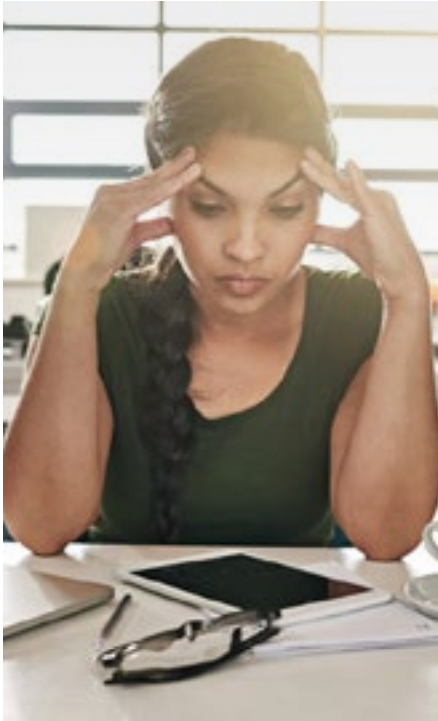
busyness that surrounds shallow work becomes self-perpetuating. The rituals of the modern workplace, such as meetings, emails and reports, further lend themselves to people mostly performing shallow work. People who have fallen into the shallow work trap may not recognise the relationship between slow productivity and shallow work.

According to Newport, the new law of productivity is: High-Quality Work Produced = (Time Spent) x (Intensity of Focus). Deep work is the ability to quickly master hard things and the ability to produce at an elite level in terms of both quality and speed. Deep work has the potential to provide individuals and teams with a competitive advantage.

Deep work is valuable, rare and meaningful.

- It is valuable because it allows people to develop new skills faster and leverage their current skills.
- It is rare because, as the world becomes full of distractions, fewer people are able to go deep.
- It is meaningful because people get more meaning and satisfaction out of being focused on their speciality.

The brain science behind deep work demonstrates its importance. When a person works on something cognitively intensive without distraction, neurons begin to wire together – the literal manifestation of "rewiring your brain". These neuron bundles help us do our work faster, more effectively and more skillfully. Every time a person is interrupted, the wiring ceases and does not start again until the person has fully regained focus.

As a manager, it is key that you educate and empower your teams to work deeply. One of the best ways to start is by requesting your team members to provide a rough breakdown on the amount of time they spend performing shallow tasks, such as answering emails, checking social media and attending meetings, as opposed to deep tasks that involve more "doing" and producing valuable outputs.

Once this has been documented, ensure the following is communicated:

- Make your expectations clear in terms of what the desired output must look like;
- Explain that time and quiet are materials and equipment that people need to do their work right; and
- Emphasise that deep work gives them the opportunity to do what they do best every day.

One of the best things a manager can do is to educate their teams about deep work and provide them with practical ways of achieving it.

There are four philosophies to integrate deep work into one's work-life on a sustained basis:

- *Monastic:* Maximise deep work by minimising or removing shallow obligations. Isolating yourself for long periods of time without distractions and where no shallow work is allowed.
- *Bimodal:* Divide your time into clearly defined stretches dedicated to deep pursuits, while leaving the rest open to everything else. In other words, reserve a few consecutive days when you will be working like a monastic. You need at least one day a week.
- *Rhythmic:* The easiest way to consistently start deep work sessions is to transform them into a simple regular habit. The rhythmic philosophy involves creating a routine where you define a specific time period – ideally three to four hours every day – that you can devote to deep work.

- *Journalistic:* Alternate your day between deep and shallow work as it fits your blocks of time.

Allow team members to find which philosophy works best for them.

Some practical things to do in order to reduce distractions are:

- *Encourage blocking your calendar.* Newport recommends that wherever you have a cognitively demanding task, you block out no less than 90 minutes. Not only should you block it out but you should treat it as sacred and not allow anything else to encroach on that time.
- *Empower team members to set up office hours for meetings and calls:* Specify when you can be disturbed. For example, have a 30-minute "office hour" every two hours during the workday. During these hours you are fully accessible. Outside these hours you cannot be reached and, instead, you spend that time producing valuable results.
- *Have the team list the single most important thing they want to complete each day:* One of the challenges of focusing in the modern workplace is that work is often ill-defined. Everything seems important and urgent which makes it difficult to prioritise and focus on the things that have a real impact. Instead of having people list out every single thing they want to accomplish in a day or week, have them identify the one thing that they believe will have the biggest impact instead.
- *Make asynchronous communication the default:* When immediate responses are the norm, your team's attention will always be divided between the work at hand and the messages coming in. But it doesn't have to be that way. Asynchronous communication is sending messages without the expectation of an immediate response. Make clear to your team that delayed responses are not only acceptable but the preferred way of communicating.

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How to use process mapping to drive efficiency

Process mapping is a useful tool for what can be summed up as "seeing the big picture and little pictures at the same time".

Process mapping is the act of creating a workflow diagram to gain a clearer understanding of how a process works.

Mapping out business processes is a great way to understand all the steps needed to complete a workflow. With process maps, employees can easily gain an overview of how processes are carried out, how they can be improved or constrained, and how many of the steps taken are necessary to drive the process to its end.

Generally, process mapping is done to establish company execution standards or procedures. Some organisations use process maps as guides or diagrams for procedural tasks, and to direct employees to follow the steps of a workflow in the correct order. Process mapping allows an organisation to track the amount of time it takes to complete a process, find process bottlenecks, enforce execution standards, automate work, identify resource wastage, streamline and improve processes, plan projects and build understanding.

This is a very useful tool to enable deep work. Process mapping can clarify the time needed to set aside for deep work. When a process is clearly marked out, employees have a bird's eye view of what a piece of work entails. This can drive efficiency as the key steps are stipulated and other unnecessary steps can be excluded. Process maps help employees understand the important characteristics of a process, allowing them to produce helpful data to use in problem-solving. Process maps allow employees to ask important questions that help improve any process.

Process mapping is also an extremely useful tool that can be used within teams. In 2008, Facebook was swiftly expanding. As the number of users increased, the design team was struggling to keep up. Issues were beginning to emerge such as when to ask or not ask for approval on certain products. This loose design process led to great ideas not being executed, frustration amongst the team members and products of different quality levels and production speeds. As more people began to join the team, there was a need to set expectations on how collaboration would work. Upon examination, the root cause was found to be the absence of agreed-upon processes.

In response, Facebook created a process map. This helped reinforce role clarity within the team. Once all the processes were mapped, working groups were created who were responsible for specific areas in the process. This created clarity in terms of what was expected, the timeframe allocated and how their work fitted into the bigger picture.

Your team may need a process map if any of the following applies:

- Two people on the same team describe the "official team process" very differently;
- Managers come in at the last minute and make changes to projects before they go live;
- People get pulled on and off projects midstream;
- Projects get cancelled halfway through;
- People get frustrated because they don't know who made a decision and why they're prioritising one thing over another; and
- People are surprised to learn of work their teammates are doing or even find out about it only after a project has been completed.

Don't underestimate the power of communication in teams

One would think that, if you were looking to compare teams and their success, a call centre would be the best place to start.

The skills required are easy to identify and team performance is easy to measure – customer satisfaction, length of calls, resolved issues and overall efficiency. However, a manager at a major bank had trouble identifying why some teams were outperforming others, even with similar metrics.

Researchers from MIT set out to understand the behaviours of teams that make them "click". Their studies looked at many different industries that had similar teams with varying performance.

For all high-performing teams observed, the one aspect that was different was the "buzz" in the team, despite the researchers not necessarily understanding what the teams were talking about. This led the research team to hypothesise that high performance does not lie in the content of the team's discussions but rather in the manner it is communicated. To prove this, all members of the observed teams were given electronic badges. The badges generated more than 100 data points a minute, working unobtrusively to track what tone of voice they used; whether they faced one another; how much they gestured; how much they talked, listened and interrupted; and even their levels of extroversion and empathy.

Results confirmed that communication did indeed play a critical role in building successful teams. Results further showed that *patterns of communication* were the most important predictors of a team's success.

Patterns of communication were the reason for the differences in performance in the bank's call centre teams. Results found that the best predictors of productivity were a team's energy and engagement outside formal meetings. Together, those two factors explained one-third of the variations in profit productivity among groups.

Based on the finding, the researchers advised that the employees' coffee breaks should all happen at the same time, which would allow for more socialising away from work. Despite initial reluctance from managers, the suggestion worked. Efficiency increased by 20% among lower-performing teams and increased by 8% overall at the call centre.

Further studies have been conducted by the same researchers in 21 organisations over seven years, measuring the communication patterns of about 2,500 people, sometimes, for six weeks at a time.

The data revealed that successful teams share several defining characteristics:

1 Everyone on the team talked and listened in roughly equal measure, keeping contributions short;
2 Members faced one another, and their conversations and gestures were energetic;
3 Members connected directly with one another – not just with the team leader;
4 Members carried on side conversations within the team; and
5 Members periodically took breaks, went exploring outside the team and brought information back.

What effective listening really entails

Given that listening accounts for 45% of time spent on communication, it is difficult not to argue the importance of listening skills in the workplace. Listening behaviours have a huge impact on the growth of business in the workplace because it shows the interaction between co-workers and how they deal with problems in their environment.

People often believe they understand what effective listening entails. In general, the following are understood to be the foundations of good listening:

1 Not talking when others are speaking;
2 Letting others know you are listening through facial expressions and verbal sounds; and
3 Being able to repeat what others have said.

In fact, much management advice on listening suggests doing these very things: encouraging listeners to remain quiet, nod and "mm-hmm" encouragingly, and then repeat back to the talker something like: "So, let me make sure I understand. What you're saying is..." However, recent research suggests that these behaviours fall far short of describing good listening skills.

Researchers analysed data describing the behaviour of 3,492 participants in a development programme for managers to be better coaches. As part of this programme, their coaching skills were assessed by others in 360-degree assessments. The top 5% of those perceived as being the most effective leaders were identified. These individuals were compared to the other individuals, and the differences were identified.

The results were grouped into four main findings:

1 Good listening is much more than being silent while the other person talks. In fact, people perceive the best listeners to be those who periodically ask questions that promote discovery and insight. Simply nodding your head is not enough evidence that a person is listening. However, asking questions shows that you are not only listening but you comprehended it well enough to want additional information. Good listening was consistently seen as a two-way dialogue, rather than a one-way speaker versus hearer interaction. The best conversations were active.
2 Good listening included interactions that build a person's self-esteem. The best listeners made the conversation a positive experience for the other person, which does not happen when the listener is passive. Good listeners made the other person feel supported and conveyed confidence in them. Good listening was characterised by the creation of a safe environment in which issues and differences could be discussed openly.
3 Good listening was seen as a cooperative conversation. In these interactions, feedback flowed smoothly in both directions with neither party becoming defensive about comments the other made. By contrast, poor listeners were seen as competitive (as listening only to identify errors in reasoning or logic, using their silence as a chance to prepare their next response). Good listeners may challenge assumptions and disagree, but the person being listened to feels the listener is trying to help, not wanting to win an argument.
4 Good listeners tended to make suggestions. Good listening invariably included some feedback provided in a way others would accept and that opened up alternative paths to consider. People are more likely to accept suggestions from people we already think are good listeners. Thus, someone who is silent for the whole conversation and then jumps in with a suggestion may not be seen as credible and may look like they are automatically in solution-mode. Someone who seems critical and then tries to give advice may not be seen as trustworthy.

Communication in remote teams

Remote teams are the future of employment. The Global Mobile Workforce Forecast Update estimates that 1.87 billion employees – over 40% of the world's working population – will be mobile by 2022.

This means a new kind of leadership and management approach is required. Remote teams face unique communication challenges, such as coordinating across time zones and overcoming language and cultural barriers. The distance also makes it harder for team members to feel like a team. Too often, team members feel like strangers who happen to be working on the same project. This causes them to miss out on the collaboration that can make work exceptional and emotionally fulfilling.

New collaboration skills are required. One important aspect that goes missing during remote communication is body language. The tone of emails can be misinterpreted causing confusion and hostility. These misinterpretations create an anxiety that can become costly – affecting morale, engagement, productivity and innovation. To perform at the highest levels, remote teams have to find new and better ways to operate.

When remote teams communicate well and leverage their strengths, they can actually gain an advantage over co-located teams. One of the best practices to master is to establish communication norms.

Remote teams need to create new norms that establish clarity in communication. Companies such as Merck have created acronyms for their digital communications – like "Four Hour Response (4HR)" and "No Need to Respond (NNTR)" – that bring predictability and certainty to virtual conversations. Individual teams can also establish their own norms, such as using different communication platforms for various purposes. Norms can also exist on an individual level, such as people's preferred response time, writing style and tone. For example, some individuals prefer short and quick messages, while others favour lengthy and detailed responses.

As more and more of our interactions happen digitally, we will continue to experience new forms of miscommunication and misunderstanding. The solution will not come from new technologies. Instead, the solution lies in understanding the new rules of engagement and in building a communication skill set that reflects the demands of our digitally-driven age.

Insights

Drivers

2

Drivers

Unpacking commitment

It has been suggested that organisational effectiveness will be enhanced where organisations are able to elicit high levels of commitment from their employees. Committed employees show higher work effectiveness and organisational citizenship behaviour, and lower absence and turnover.

Commitment, as defined by the Cambridge dictionary, is: "the fact of being willing to give your time and energy to something". Shared commitment refers to when team members are committed to each other, to the organisation and to their goals. It is not just about individual impact; it's also about how each team member positively impacts the group.

The benefits of commitment are real and measurable. An important study published in the *Journal of Occupational and Organisational Psychology* convincingly demonstrated that commitment has a more persistent influence on job performance than vice versa.

Commitment can be divided up into three kinds of commitment as illustrated below:

1   Commitment to each other and each other's success: Teams comprised of individuals that actively support, believe in and care about the success of each other will be more successful. This type of commitment promotes the comfortable shifting of duties and responsibilities among team members as necessary and allows teams to have less stress and higher productivity.
2   Commitment to the team and the team's success: Team pride and commitment are important to ultimate success. The commitment that arises from a team that understands its role and relishes achieving it is hard to undervalue. Teams with this type of commitment will overcome all odds due to their strength and unity and willingness to band together to get through a tough situation.
3   Commitment to the organisation and organisational goals: When teams see their work as supporting valuable and important organisational pursuits, this type of commitment is strengthened. This cannot be built without a clear understanding of the company direction and goals, but with those in place, this commitment can grow.

A big part of Intel's culture is something they call "disagree and commit". It means that, during meetings, team members are free to speak their mind, to agree or disagree. Then, at the end of the meeting, everyone commits to the decisions made, regardless of whether they agreed or disagreed.

Commitment is important because it fosters what Peter Senge, systems scientist and MIT lecturer, calls "shared vision". In his book *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge says, that in an organisation, a shared vision changes people's relationship with the organisation.

It is no longer "*their* organisation", it becomes "*our* organisation".

The opposite of commitment is compliance. An example is the rules of the road. Speed limits are in place to ensure the safety of all road users. A driver who is truly committed to the official speed limit will not exceed it even if there are no laws in place to enforce it. A driver who is not committed to the official speed limit has to be forced to comply with the threat of fines and penalties should they exceed it. They will comply only grudgingly and might still exceed the speed limit where they think they can get away with it.

Compliance is involuntary and unwilling. It is the opposite of commitment, which is voluntary and willing. Compliance is rule by autocracy. Where compliance is enforced, people have the mindset of "I have to do this" instead of "I want to do this." They might comply but complain about it. Teams that are ruled solely by compliance can lead to members not giving their best performance, thus impacting the overall success of the team. Creating a shared vision in a team fosters genuine commitment rather than compliance.

Senge describes, what he believes are, the seven levels of commitment amongst team members. These can be used to gauge at what level of commitment your team members are positioned:

1   *Commitment:* Willing to do whatever is required to make it happen, including creating new "laws".
2   *Enrolment:* Will do what can be done within the "spirit of the law".
3   *Genuine compliance:* Does what is expected and more by following the "letter of the law".
4   *Formal compliance:* Does what is expected and no more.
5   *Grudging compliance:* Does enough of what is expected but is not willing and complains about it.
6   *Noncompliance:* Will not do what is expected.
7   *Apathy:* No interest whatsoever. Cannot be bothered.

Increasing team commitment

Studies show that commitment is very important for teams. A 2013 study demonstrated that high-performing organisations have higher levels of commitment than low-performing organisations. Sixty-seven percent of people surveyed in high-performing organisations reported having a sense of shared commitment and responsibility, as opposed to the 43% of those surveyed in low-performing organisations who reported the same.

Teams that have high levels of shared commitment:

- Create clarity around direction and priorities;
- Align the entire team around a common objective;
- Learn from mistakes;
- Take advantage of opportunities before competitors do; and
- Change direction quickly based on changing needs.

Teams that struggle with commitment:

- Maintain ambiguity in the team about direction and priorities;
- Miss opportunities due to excessive analysis;
- Inspire lack of confidence and fear of failure;
- Revisit the same problems again and again; and
- Foster an environment of blaming others.

Some ways in which leaders can increase shared commitment within a team:

1. Provide clear and understandable team goals.
2. Choose people who work well with others and identify their strengths.
3. Encourage an open flow of communication. Be transparent.
4. Truly empower team members to do their jobs.
5. Make time for social get-togethers.
6. Encourage a culture of ideas sharing.
7. Build a culture of ownership and accountability.
8. Celebrate small and big wins.

The power of commitment: A case study

Teams are an integral part of many organisations and working in teams is on the rise. Successful teamwork relies upon collaboration between all team members, creating an environment where they are all willing to contribute and participate in order to promote and nurture a positive and effective team environment.

A recent study, comprising a literature review, considers a range of attributes necessary for successful teamwork. The aspects pertaining to team commitment are listed below:

1. Commitment to team success and shared goals: Team members are committed to the success of the team and their shared goals for the project. The team's success is of the utmost importance.
2. Interdependence: Team members create an environment where, together, they can contribute far more than as individuals. It is not just about individual impact; it is also about how each team member positively impacts the group. Individuals encourage their fellow team members to achieve, contribute and learn.
3. Interpersonal skills: The ability to discuss issues openly with team members, to be honest, trustworthy and supportive, and to show respect and commitment to the team and to its individuals. Fostering a caring work environment is important, including the ability to work effectively with other team members and supporting individuals to achieve the team's goals.

Teams of final year multimedia students completing a project-based module at an Australian University were compared using these attributes. There were 82 students (20 teams) completing this module. The project required the teams to develop skills and expertise in managing the design and development of client websites. The aim was to have students experience project management issues that occur when dealing with "real" clients in "real" projects and was heavily focused on teamwork and problem-solving.

Two of the 20 teams were selected for investigation. One team was highly successful in developing a quality product and collaborated in a highly successful manner. The other team experienced severe team problems, which caused it to become dysfunctional and had to be split. Each person was required to keep a journal of their experiences throughout the project.

Successful Team

This team of students was highly successful in developing a quality product, as well as being highly collaborative. Their journal entries continually reflected positive comments about other team members and at no stage during the semester was there a request or requirement to transfer marks from one team member to another. Team meetings were always friendly, and at no stage were team issues discussed as being problematic. The team always focused on the project's goal and how the process of development could be improved. An analysis of the data collected from this team indicated that they showed the attributes needed for successful teamwork. In almost all of their responses in interviews, focus group meetings and questionnaires, it was evident that this team was committed to:

1. Commitment to team success and shared goals: The team was highly focused on delivering a quality product and was not pre-occupied by personal issues that might have interrupted this objective. They facilitated and nurtured positive, cooperative-working relationships based upon the focus of developing a quality final product that would impress their client, tutor, peers and end-users. The whole team was strongly motivated to outperform other teams and shared a strong common goal of wanting to develop a product that would support their chances of gaining employment at the end of the course. The team members were focused on the team's goal and no one person put their personal goals ahead of the team's ultimate goal.
2. Interdependence: The team members felt that they had a responsibility towards the other members of the team and that the success of the project was based upon each team member's contribution. Team members were always happy to help peers when they were experiencing difficulties. The team would proactively brainstorm problems individual team members were having and offer assistance if needed.
3. Interpersonal skills: The team recognised that team members had different personalities and experienced problems at different stages. They showed consideration for each other, and respected and supported others in difficult times.

Unsuccessful Team

The other team of students experienced severe team problems, which caused it to become dysfunctional and had to be split. At the first peer assessment session, marks were transferred between team members as it was perceived that some team members were not contributing. This indicates that team members had their own interests ahead of the team's. Even though it was agreed at this meeting to transfer marks and suggestions were made about how to improve the situation, resentment amongst team members escalated. This was clearly evident from the comments being made through the confidential online journal entries each week. At one of the team meetings, a serious disagreement occurred in which one of the team members verbally berated another. After this, reconciliation was impossible. After this altercation, team members felt they could no longer work together, so, even though they would experience a heavier workload, they unanimously agreed to split and form two separate teams. Comparing responses from this team against the key attributes needed for successful teams, it was evident that this team was not congruent with these criteria:

1. **Commitment to team success and shared goals:** One team member was highly motivated to achieve a high-quality product, though two others were content with merely just gaining a pass – they were happy to put in minimal effort. This mismatch of commitment levels caused many problems and frustration for team members early in the project.
2. **Interdependence:** Two team members were highly competitive in this team that negated the development of a collaborative team environment. They were highly focused on their own tasks and were not interested in helping others who may have been having problems. If others were not performing, the attitude was that peer assessment should be applied rather than trying to support and help the individual. There was no consideration regarding how each team member positively impacted the group.
3. **Interpersonal skills:** The team showed little consideration for each other and gave almost no support for others in difficult times. Team members seemed unaware and very surprised that they had upset other team members with their comments. They seemed not to have detected that they were hurting others' feelings with their comments and the approaches taken to solve team problems.

This case study demonstrates how important and pervasive shared commitment in a team is, and how a negative result can occur when it is not consistently demonstrated.

A team is geared towards success when team members understand the team's purpose, share the same goals, are all committed to succeed, have the belief that one cannot succeed unless the other members of the group succeed and that, together, the group can deliver more than the individuals in the team.

The power of accountability

Accountability is people's ability to understand what is expected of them, to exercise authority and to take responsibility for delivering results. Accountability practices emerged as among the most important drivers of organisational health and, ultimately, performance in McKinsey research based on the Organisational Health Index (OHI).

Of course, some companies are better at fostering it than others. Starbucks is an example of an organisation that does a good job of fostering accountability.

During the economic slowdown of 2008, Starbucks took a hit where 600 stores closed and profit fell by 28%. Leadership during that time blamed the economy and increased price of dairy for the downfall. That was until Howard Shultz came back as CEO after leaving eight years prior. He held leadership accountable rather than blaming things that cannot be controlled, like the economy and dairy prices. He said: "Starbucks's heavy spending to accommodate its expansion has created a bureaucracy that masked its problems."

Shultz's solution to the problem was to create a strategy that developed brand trust. The initiative, called "My Starbucks Idea", created a way for customers to share ideas directly with the company and with each other. The programme was a success and Starbucks pulled out of its slump. Had Shultz not held leadership accountable, it is unlikely the organisation would have solved the problem.

McKinsey has consistently found that improving role clarity improves accountability, an outcome that is a critical component of the overall health-index score. In fact, organisations with high accountability scores have a 76% probability of achieving top-quartile organisational health – more than triple the expected rate.

It is obvious when a team does not have joint accountability.

Teams lacking in accountability:
- Create resentment among team members who have different standards of performance;
- Encourage mediocrity;
- Miss deadlines; and
- Put disproportionate pressure on leaders to discipline.

Teams that are accountable:
- Make sure poor performers feel pressure to improve;
- Identify problems quickly by questioning one another;
- Establish respect among team members who are held to same high standards; and
- Avoid excessive bureaucracy around management and corrective actions.

Some ways in which to build accountability are to:
1. **Ask questions:** Questions help people deconstruct the details of performance and consider alternatives without becoming defensive.
2. **Create humiliation-free zones:** Performance standards should not be intended to "name and shame." It is the leaders' responsibility to create a safe space where problems can be solved, rather than simply blaming individuals.
3. **Break big goals into specific elements:** Analysing the details that accumulate to produce either failure or success can make it easier to identify steps for improvement. This also makes it easier to find strengths as well as weaknesses.
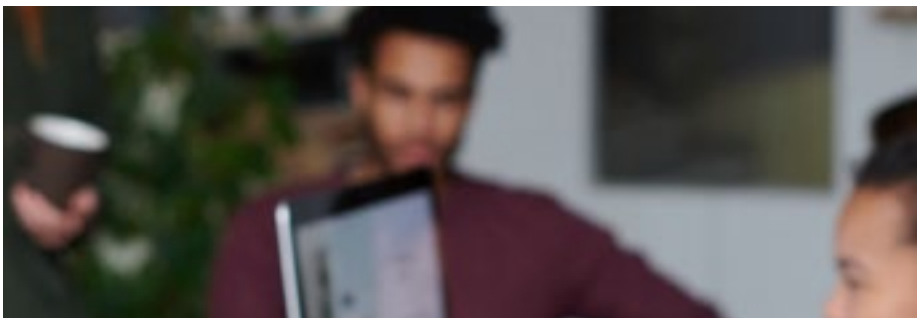
Leading people to be accountable

Every leader knows that accountability is important. It is painful when an employee does not take accountability, yet all too often, leaders avoid having conversations regarding accountability until it is too late.

Conversations regarding accountability usually occur only when a lack of accountability has caused problems and, thus, the tone is often punitive.

Jonathan Raymond, author, executive coach and leadership speaker, created The Accountability Dial consisting of five steps:

Managers can foster and develop this framework of skills to engage with their direct reports. It allows a focus on employees' counterproductive behaviours and engages with their team member in a non-punitive or authoritarian tone – driven from the manager's personal desire to help their team members grow. This tool ultimately assists the employee in taking accountability for their own behaviours.

1 **The Mention – Naming the behaviour:** This speaks to the skill of recognising a behaviour that may not yet be problematic but is likely to become a problem in future. By addressing a potential issue in an informal manner before a crisis occurs, it creates mutual respect by acknowledging that they are overwhelmed instead of pretending you do not see it. It might sound like:
   a. "I noticed a few typos in that newsletter that's about to go out. Did you see those?"
   b. "I saw a flurry of emails come in overnight. Anything worth talking about?"
   c. "You seem a bit overwhelmed this week. Something going on?"
   d. "You seemed frustrated in the meeting this morning, anything you want to talk about?"

2 **The Invitation – Framing the pattern:** The Invitation is the step a manager needs to take when the employee has not changed behaviours stated in The Mention. It simply takes the behaviour discussed in The Mention one step further. It often assists the employee to think about the situation more proactively. It might sound like:
   a. "Remember that comment I made about typos in the newsletter the other day? I saw a few in the memo you sent me yesterday. I'm a bit concerned that it may be happening more often. Are you moving too fast on things?"
   b. "You didn't come back to me about emails. Did that all get resolved? I was wondering about where it went after we talked."

   c. "Are you still feeling overwhelmed? You seem a little stressed still, but maybe that's just me. Has it gotten better? Has it gotten worse?"

3 **The Conversation – Getting to self-interest:** This is the opportunity to go deeper by asking questions that guide employees to understand the impact of their behaviour. The four questions to focus on are:
   a. How is this behaviour causing more work or unnecessary frustration for their team members?
   b. How is this behaviour causing more work or unnecessary frustration for themselves and their manager?
   c. How is this behaviour causing more work or unnecessary frustration for their customers or stakeholders (or vendors, partners, or other stakeholders)?
   d. How is this behaviour holding them back from becoming the person they want to be?

The final two steps cover the ground of consequences and potential termination. If the first three steps are properly followed, the need for the final two should decrease.

This framework is a guide for managers who are always asking: "How do I get my people to be more accountable for results?"

The highest form of leadership is to develop the strength not to give people the answers. Rather, your job is to create a space where they can discover the answers for themselves.

Can more than one person be accountable?

The word "accountability" is often thrown around and a lack of it is cited as a reason why things go awry. But do you really know what accountability is?

Most of us have experienced the word "accountability" as punitive – a "punishment" for not doing something. It is viewed as punishment because accountability typically lurks at the back end of the business process. Accountability shows up when something goes wrong, and people start to lay blame. They start pointing fingers.

One of the most common mistakes is to believe that the accountable person is the one who will be blamed if things go wrong. Too often, people use the phrase "I take complete accountability" to mean that they are willing to accept the consequences of their poor decisions.

Accountability is not simply taking the blame when something goes wrong. It is not a confession. Accountability is about delivering on a commitment. It is a responsibility to an outcome, not just a set of tasks. It is taking initiative with thoughtful, strategic follow-through.

Accountability and responsibility are often interchangeably, but these words have distinct meanings that separate them and their roles in the workplace.

Responsibility is task-oriented. Every person on a team may be responsible for a given task that is required to complete a project. **Accountability** is what happens after a situation has occurred. It is how you respond and take ownership of the results. Responsibility can therefore be shared (tasks can be shared). Responsibility focuses on defined roles, job descriptions, and processes that must be in place to achieve a goal.

If one had to split the word accountability into two parts, you would see the following:

1 Account – "A report or description of an event or experience" – Oxford dictionary; and
2 Ability – "Possession of the means or skill to do something" – Oxford dictionary.

Combined "accountability" is literally the ability to report on events or experiences. Therefore, it is the responsibility to monitor what occurs during a project. The job of being accountable for something should be assigned to a single individual whose duty it is to monitor a specific task or process. If more than one person is accountable, then each person will assume that the other is monitoring and most cases this will lead to nobody monitoring.

A powerful tool to use for identifying those who are responsible and those accountable is a RACI matrix. The RACI matrix enables you to determine who is responsible, accountable, consulted or informed for every task which needs to be done on a project. Below are descriptions of each stakeholder and the rules associated with each category.

1 **Responsible:** These are the people or roles responsible for performing the task, that is, the actual people doing the work to complete the task. This should be limited to prevent role ambiguity.
2 **Accountable:** Essentially, the accountable person must sign off the work that the responsible person produces. Typically, the owner of the process will be the accountable person. There should only ever be one accountable person per task.
3 **Consulted:** These may be subject matter experts who need to be consulted. These are the people who will do the thinking.
4 **Informed:** These are the people who are informed as to the status of the task or process.

The benefits of using a RACI matrix are to have a clear overview of all roles within the team and to reduce the risk of accountability being absconded or evaded.

What is psychological safety?

Let's start with a rather typical vignette of a recently hired executive who has joined a company going through a takeover. He knows something looks risky but, because he is not yet part of the team and does not want to create a bad first impression, he keeps silent.

Unfortunately, the above illustrates what happens too often in the world. People are more focused on impression management. People tend to avoid looking:

1 **Ignorant** by not asking questions;
2 **Incompetent** by not admitting mistakes or weaknesses;
3 **Intrusive** by not offering ideas; or
4 **Negative** by not critiquing the status quo.

By doing the above, we rob ourselves and our colleagues of small moments of learning, which reduces the opportunities for innovation.

According to Amy Edmondson, a professor at Harvard Business School who first identified the concept of psychological safety in work teams in 1999, psychological safety is a belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes.

Edmondson stumbled upon this concept quite by accident. She was conducting research looking at the question "Do better hospital teams make fewer human-related medication errors?" She used a team effectiveness survey in conjunction with the number of human-related drug errors over 1,000 days. The results were the exact opposite of what had been expected. The better performing teams made more mistakes.

When thinking of reasons to explain this puzzle, Edmondson hypothesised that the teams were not making more mistakes but were simply more willing to discuss them.

In order to prove this, Edmondson sent a researcher to study the teams with no idea of the teams' error rates or effectiveness. He found that the most significant differences between the teams were their willingness and ability to talk about errors. The better teams had a climate of openness that allowed them to report mistakes which, in turn, led them to work together to find ways of reducing the errors.

Since then, the research has piled on, showing that psychological safety can make, not just teams but, entire organisations perform better.

A study at Google investigated the factors contributing to team effectiveness. The researchers found that what really mattered was less about who is on the team and more about how the team worked together. Psychological safety was listed as the number one key to team effectiveness out of a list of five.

Psychological safety and accountability: A trade-off?

Managers are often nervous when it comes to psychological safety.

There is an understanding that psychological safety can help people learn but it is often confusing to managers. They ask: "Does this mean I cannot expect excellence because people are not held accountable for great results?"

Edmondson, the father of psychological safety, goes on to say that it is not a trade-off against accountability but rather that they are two separate dimensions. Leaders who create psychological safety and hold their employees accountable for excellence are the highest performing. According to Edmondson, it is all about finding the balance, as illustrated in the image below.

If there is a lack of both psychological safety and accountability, people become apathetic and simply do what they need to do without questioning anything nor striving for excellence.

If there is only psychological safety, you create a comfort zone where it is easier for people to raise their concerns and question the status quo. But, without accountability, it can result in people feeling too comfortable – which can lead to poor performance and a lack of motivation.

Holding people accountable is essential for getting the best from them but, without psychological safety, it can create an environment characterised by stress and anxiety. In this zone, people are afraid to speak up, so they continue to strive for excellence, even if they believe something is incorrect or could be improved. This is what hinders learning.

The learning zone, also known as the high-performance zone, occurs when a team is free from anxiety, which allows them to strive for excellence without fear of repercussions.

Thus, it is important to note that having psychological safety within a team does not mean that excellence has to be sacrificed. It is all about finding the fine balance between the two separate dimensions.

Creating a culture of psychological safety

Psychological safety is not about being nice. It is about giving candid feedback, openly admitting mistakes and learning from each other. We see this kind of organisational culture is increasingly important in the modern economy. It is about candour, taking risks, being willing to say, "I screwed that up" and being willing to ask for help.

A real-life example of the absence of psychological safety is the American Bank, Wells Fargo. In 2015, it was viewed as one of the world's most admired organisations. It was very much a customer-oriented, household-oriented bank. Their strategy was to use cross-selling. It is easier to leverage an already existing relationship and sell more products than to build new relationships. They even had a slogan "Going for GR8". The idea was that the bank should be able to sell a customer eight different financial services products. Unfortunately, the idea did not take into consideration that people could not afford eight different products.

The executives did not get any indication that this idea was not practical. Thus, they continued to push the idea and wanted to achieve the targets that were set. The managers were very tough. They were not receptive to feedback that the idea might not work, and the employees really did not feel it was safe to push back – to say this isn't working, it can't be done. If psychological safety had been present, the idea could have been tweaked before being sent to market, which could have potentially avoided the business failure.

An industry that has mastered psychological safety in the workplace, and has gained a competitive advantage, is the movie industry. Most movie producers and most movie houses will have an occasional hit and then a few failures. Pixar is a company that has had 17 major box office successes in a row that have also been critically acclaimed. It is an unheard-of success.

Ed Catmull, recently retired president of Pixar, went out of his way to create, and keep creating, a psychologically safe environment where candour and critical feedback is expected. He did this in two fundamental ways:

1 Behavioural: Catmull often said things like "Here's the mistake I made," because leaders have to go first. Leaders have to show that they know that they are fallible human beings.
2 Structural: He set up meetings and sessions that were designed in thoughtful ways to make it easier for people to give each other candid feedback or to really critique the movie. He often said "Early on, all of our movies are bad. You know, they're terrible." He always highlighted that he

said it, not because it's necessarily good news, but because he wanted everyone to know that it is just part of the journey. There is no way of becoming brilliant without going through bad experiences. One needs to just keep pushing back until it is made better. Catmull always said that criticising is never enjoyable, but he would rather get feedback from people he worked with than from the box office later.

People always ask how to build psychological safety and, drawing upon Catmull's approach, it can be divided into three aspects:

1 Frame the work as a learning problem, not as an execution problem. Leaders can explicitly state that there is enormous uncertainty ahead and interdependence. " We have never been here before. And, as a result, we do not know what will happen, so, we need everyone's brains and voices in the game." This assists in building a rationale for speaking up.
2 Acknowledge your own fallibility: Leaders, like Catmull, need to acknowledge that they are imperfect too by saying things like: "I may miss something I need to hear from you."
3 Model curiosity: Ensure to always ask a lot of questions which creates a necessity for voice.

These three factors can contribute towards a workplace where potential catastrophe – due to people being too scared to speak up – is avoided.

Leverage the power of diverse thinking

In terms of South Africa's Employment Equity Act, affirmative action includes "making reasonable accommodation for people from designated groups in order to ensure that they enjoy equal opportunities and are equitably represented" (EEA, 2013).

It is not this article's intention to question these processes and the thinking behind them. It is, however, unfortunate that the legislative context hampers the true meaning of diversity. In this context, diversity is believed to be limited to race and gender, whereas an inclusive workforce means much more.

Diversity can be divided into two types: inherent and acquired. Inherent diversity refers to traits you are born with, such as gender and ethnicity. Acquired diversity focuses on traits you gain from experience. South Africa's affirmative action plan aims at addressing inherent diversity.

Writing in Harvard Business Review, researchers Alison Reynolds and David Lewis report some fascinating findings. Reynolds and Lewis studied how well executive teams could complete a strategic execution task under time pressure. They discovered that the kinds of diversity we most commonly think of – gender, race and age – had no correlation to a team's results. What did have a correlation, was the diversity of thinking.

This type of diversity focuses on the inclusion of people who have different styles of processing knowledge and solving problems. Each human being has a unique blend of identities, cultures and experiences that inform how he or she thinks, interprets, negotiates and accomplishes a task.

We all think differently and no one way of thinking has been agreed upon as correct. What is agreed, however, is that the way we think governs the way we work. Research shows that, while we are all capable of thinking in various ways, most people have a preferred way of approaching and solving problems.

In 1985, an American psychologist, Robert Sternberg, developed the Triarchic Model of Intelligence which encompasses three different types of intelligence: analytical, creative and practical. When applying this to a team at work solving a problem, the most effective combination is to have at least one person who is logical; at least one person who sees things from a different or unusual perspective; and one who is knowledgeable about the processes involved. Thus, having a homogenous thinking team, is not the most effective. Understanding your preferred style and the style of others in the team increases the likelihood of effective problem-solving.

There are various ways of classifying and looking at thinking styles. For example, Dr Judy Chartrand went on to describe seven different thinking styles in 2013: Analytical, Inquisitive, Insightful, Open-Minded, Systematic, Timely and Truth-seeking. There is agreement that thinking styles vary across individuals. According to a study by Deloitte, cultivating "diversity of thought" at your business can boost innovation and creative problem-solving, and guard against the phenomenon of GroupThink.

To increase diversity of thought among your workforce, the following needs to occur:

1 **Hire differently**: The job description and interview process should contain competencies and questions designed to help identify and select a cognitively diverse organisation. A good way of ascertaining different thinking styles is to request the potential employee to complete a work sample or solve a small problem before selection.
2 **Manage differently**: Instead of seeking consensus, managers should encourage task-focused conflict that can push their teams to new levels of creativity and productivity. The aim is to foster an environment where all feel comfortable sharing their views and their authentic selves.
3 **Promote differently**: Moving towards more of a team-based performance evaluation framework can allow an organisation to create and foster a culture of inclusion that empowers its people, encourages collaboration and inspires more innovation.

Neurodiversity: A different perspective

Neurodiversity is a fairly new concept that was developed in the 1990s. It is the diversity of human brains and minds.

This concept theorises that neurological differences such as Dyslexia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), the Autistic Spectrum and Tourette syndrome are simply a result of normal variations in the human genome and should not be viewed in any way as disabilities.

Neurodiversity in the workplace is gaining attention. It has been suggested that it provides a competitive advantage. The skills of people who are not 'neurotypical' are now being viewed as strengths. Although one cannot generalise:

1 People with autism often have enhanced perceptual functioning, high levels of concentration and technical ability;
2 People with Dyslexia often have strong spatial intelligence and entrepreneurial tendencies; and
3 People with ADHD are often hyper-focused, creative and inventive.

About two years ago, EY embarked on a programme to hire individuals with Asperger's. People with Asperger's syndrome often have average or above-average levels of intelligence and are often highly educated, though they may experience significant social difficulties. These four new recruits were placed in the Accounting support function and were provided with training that included looking at soft skills, work ethic, expectations and how to communicate. The four individuals hired were found to be incredibly detail-orientated and good at process-driven work.

Seventy-five per cent of the employees at the Danish software company, Specialisterne, have some form of autism. The work required is routine and detailed, and plays to their strengths. Other organisations that have now begun including neurodiversity into the workforce are Hewlett Packard, Microsoft, Ford and IBM.

The case for neurodiverse hiring is especially compelling given the skills shortages that increasingly afflict technology and other industries. For example according to a European Commission study, the European Union faces a shortage of 800,000 IT workers by 2020. The most significant deficits are expected to be in strategically important and rapidly expanding areas, such as data analytics and IT services implementation. The tasks in these fields are a good match with the abilities of some neurodiverse people.

While some time and resources are needed to identify ways to minimise any potential difficulties – such as relooking at the hiring process and creating an optimal workspace – there are clear benefits and competitive advantages to having employees who think differently.

Diversity in virtual teams

In today's global village environment, doing business increasingly means operating in a virtual environment. This is due to both globalisation and a talent shortage.
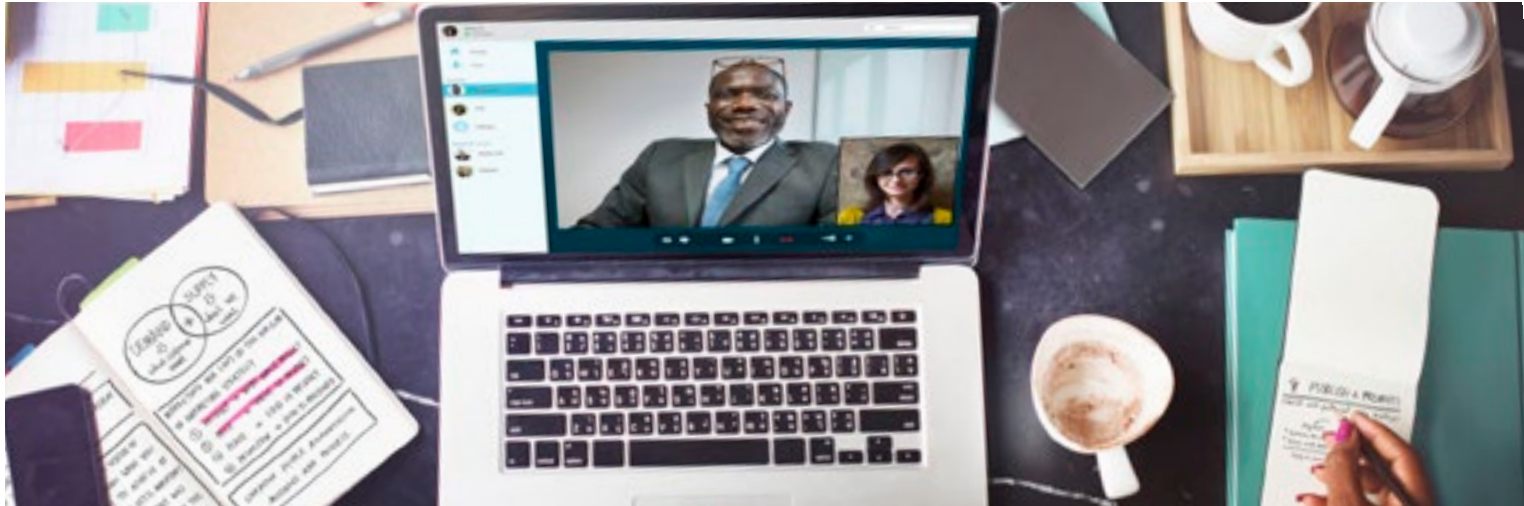
A virtual team can consist of members across towns, countries and time zones. One must be able to adapt to and leverage the different work styles and cultures, and utilise appropriate technologies to create efficiencies in the global workplace.

Some of the key challenges for culturally diverse virtual teams are:

1   Communication

Due to the geographical distance separating their members, virtual teams rely on communication and technologies to facilitate interaction and to coordinate work. Communication is a critical factor for any team but particularly for virtual teams that are also culturally diverse. Mehrabian, in his study conducted in the 1960s, highlighted the effectiveness of human communication. Mehrabian's experiments showed that in interpersonal communication, less than 7% of the meaning of communication is contained in the words; some 38% of the meaning is contained in the pitch, tone, emphasis and volume of the words; and the bulk of the meaning, some 55%, is contained in body language and context.

While people are often shocked when they first hear this, they accept it fairly quickly. In virtual teams that communicate in languages that are often not a person's first language, the potential for misunderstanding is high. Mehrabian's findings demonstrate that the bulk of meaning is communicated via body language and context, both of which are difficult to grasp in a virtual team.

These are the three areas that must be considered when designing a collaborative team environment:

- People;
- Process; and
- Technology.

These components make up the bulk of the team and its communication styles. The way in which we communicate is enormously influenced by our culture. Culture poses communication problems because there are so many variables unknown to the communicators. For the person communicating in a multicultural environment, one must remember that the message that ultimately counts is the one that the other person gets, not the one that is sent. There need to be guidelines regarding the communication process in a virtual team and the correct technological platform to enhance communication.

2   Trust

Trust is the essential ingredient for a successful team. Effective communication will produce a healthy degree of trust and a large component of success is based on trust. It does not mean the members have to like each other, but they do have to be able to understand and rely on each other.

Trust is the "glue" of the virtual workplace. Trust is the basis of a team as it is the foundation where real teamwork begins. Without trust, admissions of weaknesses and mistakes are met with fear of punishment and asking for help becomes more difficult if there is little trust.

When establishing trust in virtual working teams, there are underlying cultural aspects of trust that must be recognised. A lack of trust can result in a lot of wasted time managing behaviours and interactions between team members. Lack of trust can create a reluctance to take risks or ask for assistance. It can lead to low morale and, ultimately, high staff turnover. It is important for members of the team to have the confidence to speak up or offer suggestions. People tend to trust those whom they perceive as similar to themselves. This means that trust is difficult to establish in virtual teams where members are likely to have different backgrounds, experiences and cultures.

3   The Three Cultures

The Three Cultures map shows how both trust and communication are developed and reached via a three-tiered approach: National Culture, Organisational Culture and Personal Culture. The three cultures are separate entities and interlinked with one another. When one works in virtual teams across borders, one clearly works within these three cultures. The unique individual operates within their own culture, which is responsible for establishing the foundations from which one makes judgments, forms opinions and formalises decisions. There may be several national cultures that are represented and, even within the corporate culture, there are often differences. These appear, at first glance, to be subtle but, once we go below the surface, the organisational culture can be significantly different between offices and countries.

Once team members are sufficiently aware of their own enculturation, they can then see how comprehensively it affects their own decision making, particularly in the area of developing trust and communication techniques. Team members can then progress to understanding other cultures and begin learning how to build trust with people from different cultures. This will improve their understanding not only of the things that are said but also of those that are not said.

Four steps to help you learn from your mistakes

"A smart man makes a mistake, learns from it, and never makes that mistake again." – Roy H. Williams, author and marketing expert.

Have you ever found yourself saying "I'll never do that again" only to find yourself doing the exact same thing just a short time later? If so, you are not alone. All of us have repeated some of our mistakes at one time or another. However, making the same mistakes can be costly in many ways – such as people losing faith in your promises or even in terms of money.

Here are four steps to help you to learn from your mistakes.

1 Own your mistakes:
You cannot learn anything from a mistake until you admit that you have made it and accept full responsibility for your role in it. Although it is very uncomfortable, admit to it and apologise if necessary. In the long run, people will remember your courage and integrity long after they have forgotten the original mistake.

2 Reframe your mistake:
How you view your mistakes determines the way that you react to them and what you do next. Chances are that you will view your error in a purely negative light for as long as the initial shock and discomfort about it persist. But, if you can reframe your mistake, for example by using a reframing matrix and reframe it as an opportunity to learn, you will motivate yourself to become more knowledgeable and resilient.

When you've acknowledged your mistake, think about what you could do to prevent it from happening again. For example, if you didn't follow a process properly, consider introducing a more robust checklist or a clearer process document.

Following on from Dweck's work on mindsets, if you have a "growth" mindset, you likely see mistakes as an opportunity to improve and not as something that you are doomed to repeat because your mindset is "fixed" on the belief that you cannot improve.

3 Ask yourself tough questions:
Next, you need to analyse your mistake honestly and objectively. Ask yourself the following questions:

- What was I trying to do?
- What went wrong?
- When did it go wrong?
- Why did it go wrong?
- What could I do better next time?
- What did I learn from this?

4 Make a plan:
Beating yourself up for your mistakes will not help you down the road. It is important to spend the bulk of your time thinking about how to do better in the future. Make a plan that will help you avoid making a similar mistake. Be as detailed as possible but remain flexible since your plan may need to change. Whether you find an accountability partner or you track your progress on a calendar, find a way to hold yourself accountable.

Change for change's sake can be advantageous

Businesses need to adapt as environmental changes occur so they can stay relevant in a competitive landscape. Change is inevitable.

But the idea that an organisation might want change for its own sake often provokes scepticism. Why inflict all that pain if you don't have to?

It has been suggested that organisations need to make internal changes, regardless of the competitive landscape. Even if the external environment is not changing, the internal environment probably is. Dynamics within an organisation are constantly shifting and require the organisation to change along with them.

When organisations avoid making changes for too long, problems such as silo formation and the creation of a numbing routine can follow. These developments can be likened to cholesterol. While everything is going well, organisations tend not to notice them, just as seemingly fit people do not realise their arteries are dangerously clogged.

Silo Formation

Typically in an organisation, once people become comfortable in their existing groups, they stop communicating and coordinating with others outside their department, and fail to see others' perspectives. Collaboration tends to get trapped in silos. Over the years, employees will only identify with others in their units, and their networks in the firm will be dominated by those people. Gradually, they will become insular and this can harm an organisation's ability to innovate and identify new opportunities. One way to overcome this is to reorganise the organisation's structure.

From 1997 to 2001, a technology company called Cisco Systems was organised into three units representing three lines of business, each focused on a distinct customer type. In a major reshuffle following the company's first ever loss in 2001, Cisco was reorganised by function. This was a success until 2004, when the organisation decided to revisit the organisational structure.

The Impact of Routine

Organisational stability is great unless the market shifts; then, it is more difficult to make the required changes. So too, the less people in organisations explore and search for new opportunities, the less capable they are of doing so. As James March of Stanford University famously explained: Exploitation (doing what works today) drives out exploration (seeking out risky but potentially valuable new ways of doing things). It is also important to experience different kinds of changes.

For years, Hewlett-Packard oscillated between reorganising the structure from centralised to de-centralised. These periodic changes initially yielded benefits but, eventually, became a familiar process. Hewlett-Packard ended up exchanging one set of deficiencies for another. Ultimately, the company's performance suffered.

In undertaking periodic change initiatives, it is important to vary the focus by choosing a different category and zoning in on a different aspect for each round of change.

Adaptability as a result of curiosity

We live in a time of risk and instability. Globalisation, new technologies and greater transparency have combined to upend the business environment and give many CEOs a deep sense of unease.

Just look at the numbers. Since 1980, the volatility of business operating margins – largely static since the 1950s – has more than doubled. Staying competitive in today's business world poses a constant demand on an organisation's skill and will to adapt to change.

Organisations do not fail because of changes in the environment; they fail because their leaders are either unwilling or incapable of dealing with change. This means that staying competitive in today's environment warrants not only the skill and will to adapt to change but also the foresight to anticipate it.

Of the companies listed on the Fortune 500 in 1955, only 61 remained in 2014. That means 88% of the original companies either went bankrupt, merged or disappeared due to decreased total revenues. Less than one per cent of companies actually make the Fortune 500, which means those that do are the best at what they do. In fact, another Forbes article highlights that, 50 years ago, the life expectancy of a firm in the Fortune 500 was around 75 years. Today, it's less than 15 years and declining.

Unfortunately, one of the reasons organisations plummet is not because they fail to strive to do better, but because they do not ask themselves the right questions and/or are unwilling to implement the solution. As a result, they do not evolve.

One powerful way of being more adaptable as an organisation is to fuel curiosity. Curiosity arises when there's a gap between what you know and what you need to know to be effective, and to fuel curiosity is to keep people engaged. Although leaders might say they treasure inquisitive minds, most stifle curiosity, fearing it will increase risk and inefficiency. In a survey conducted among more than 3,000 employees from a wide range of firms and industries, only about 24% reported feeling curious in their jobs on a regular basis, and about 70% said they face barriers to asking more questions at work. Organisations should hire for curiosity and model inquisitiveness, and they should emphasise learning and allow employees to ask "why?"

In most organisations, leaders and employees alike receive the implicit message that asking questions is an unwanted challenge to authority. They are trained to focus on their work without looking closely at the process or their overall goals. But maintaining a sense of curiosity is crucial to creativity and innovation. The most effective leaders look for ways to nurture their employees' curiosity to fuel learning and discovery.

Insights

Accelerators

3

Defining employee empowerment

If you were to begin defining empowerment in the workplace, you could start with looking at bees. Bees' highly decentralised form of government allows the worker bees, who are closest to the information, to act upon it immediately and make the most informed decisions.

They do not need to return to the colony for the queen bee to make a decision. Bees understand that the queen bee is not always in the best position to make a decision. She spends her entire life inside the hive and has limited knowledge of the outside world.

Employee empowerment can be defined in a number of ways. We define employee empowerment as: when you give employees a certain degree of autonomy and responsibility for decision-making regarding their specific organisational tasks. When you empower employees, you give them the ability to make certain decisions, rather than having employees who only follow the standard procedures when working independently. It allows decisions to be made at the lower levels of an organisation where employees have a unique view of the issues and problems facing the organisation at a certain level.

Empowering employees is a win-win situation for both the employee and the organisation. From the employee's point of view, it helps them improve their skills, develop, think practically and take decisions as per the required situation. It is an opportunity for them to take control of the situation and be independent.

According to the Harvard Business Review, when employees feel empowered at work, it's associated with stronger job performance, job satisfaction and commitment to the organisation.

A study by the Gallup Organisation found that organisations that empower employees experience 50% higher customer satisfaction. When employees are not empowered, customers must work their way up the chain of command in order to get their problems resolved. Empowered employees can resolve issues immediately leading to increased customer satisfaction.

Pepperdine University identified 40 of the most empowered companies and compared their financial performance across 12 categories to 500 stock exchange averages. Their results clearly indicated that empowerment correlates with financial success.

Increased empowerment has also been linked to greater job satisfaction. A study surveyed 1,168 employees from 31 different organisations and found that staff members are most satisfied in their jobs when they feel empowered in their day-to-day experiences at work.

Empowerment leads to increased accountability. When empowered, a person feels that their boss has confidence in their ability to make decisions. That confidence means they will get the job done and that they will do the job to the best of their ability. They have the resources and the authority to step up and take action.

Enablement: The key to empowerment

Empowerment means "authority or power given to someone to do something". There is little doubt regarding the numerous benefits resulting from empowered employees. However, despite the buzz regarding empowerment, too often, organisations speak about empowering their employees but, in reality, this is not true.

Empowering employees can not be a strategy on its own. Throwing people into the deep end is not always the best way to reap the benefits of workplace empowerment. The majority of those in management positions are not yet ready for this redistribution of power.

To enable is traditionally defined as "to provide someone with the resources, authority or opportunity to do something; to make something possible or feasible". If organisations really want to help empower employees, they have to do more than just give authority and control. They have to help employees manage their new autonomy.

Empowerment and enablement need to work together. Enablement involves helping people develop the necessary competencies to manage their own empowerment effectively and providing the necessary tools. When enablement is not part of an empowerment effort, the effort is likely to fail.

The term "enablement" refers to the practice of actively assisting ordinary employees in developing the skills they need to effectively manage their newly empowered status by supplying the means, knowledge and opportunity to do something.

The leader's role is not to empower others for the sake of empowerment by merely transferring power. It is a strategic view of leadership that builds enabling structures, cultures and habits to support and develop others to become effective, self-autonomous individuals who are full of ideas, innovation and drive that creates a competitive edge for the business.

The art of positive empowerment

There is a large consensus regarding the positive benefits resulting from employee engagement. A meta-analysis of all available field experiments on leaders empowering subordinates was conducted on a total of 105 studies. The study's focus assessed whether an empowering leadership style was linked to improved job performance and whether this was true of different types of performance, such as routine task performance, organisational citizenship behaviour and creativity.

Besides demonstrating the benefits of empowerment, such as increased levels of creativity, trust, organisational citizenship behaviour and sense of autonomy, another interesting finding was revealed.

When a leader empowers employees, they ask them to take on additional challenges and responsibilities at work. Employees could view this in one of two ways:

Greater autonomy or shared decision-making as an indication that the leader trusts them and is providing them with opportunities for self-development and growth; or

They may see those as evidence that the leader cannot lead and is trying to avoid making difficult decisions.

In the second view, employees may become frustrated and uncertain about their role, leading to poorer performance on tasks. It is therefore vital that, when trying to empower their employees, leaders do not add too much pressure or create uncertainty.

There are times when empowering someone who is not ready for it can backfire. There are many reasons, such as the newly empowered employee not being able to handle the increased responsibility, stress or work; they may not be good at making decisions; and they may make bad decisions and not disclose the outcome until it is too late to be fixed.

The study showed that the effects of leading by empowering others are determined by how employees perceive their leader's behaviour. The study found that empowering leadership can become positive under the following conditions:

1   When empowerment is underpinned by mentoring and supporting employee development, it can create a trusting relationship;
2   Employees have their own expectations of how much leaders should try to empower them. When the leaders' empowering approaches align with subordinates' expectations – for example, if they grant just enough autonomy and decision-making responsibilities; and

3   Empowering leadership had a stronger positive influence on the performance of employees who had less experience in the organisation compared to employees who had been in their jobs for longer.

When considering empowering somebody, take the following into consideration:

- Look for traits that are critical to success such as confidence, morals and good communication skills;
- Have a conversation to ascertain whether empowerment and extra responsibility is what the individual wants or can handle;
- Ensure that a development plan is in place to build leadership skills;
- Ensure expectations and boundaries are clearly set out; and
- Monitor them closely.

Celebrate small wins to boost performance

In a 1968 issue of Harvard Business Review, Frederick Herzberg published a now-classic article titled *One more time: How do you motivate employees?* His message was that people are most satisfied with their jobs (and therefore most motivated) when those jobs give them the opportunity to experience achievement.

In order to investigate this message in the modern context, Amabile and Kramer conducted a multi-year research project. They aimed to uncover what makes people happy, motivated, creative and productive at work. To do this, they asked 238 people, from seven organisations, to send them a diary at the end of each workday. The diary form requested that the participants provided ratings on a number of items, including their mood, motivation, productivity and creativity that day. But the most important item asked them to describe one event that stood out in their mind from that day. In the end, the researchers had nearly 12,000 of these dairies.

The findings were extremely interesting. Of all the things that can boost emotions, motivation and perceptions during a workday, the single most important is making consistent and meaningful progress. And, the more frequently people experience that sense of progress, the more likely they are to be creatively productive in the long run. Findings showed that it did not matter what the goal was, everyday progress, even a small win, can make all the difference in how they feel and perform. This is known as the progress principle. Capturing small wins every day enhanced a worker's motivation.

Canadian-based educator and motivational speaker, Merhnaz Bassiri, summarised small wins well by saying: "Small wins have a transformational power. Once a small win has been accomplished, forces are set in motion to favour another small win and another small win until the combination of these small wins lead to larger and greater accomplishments."

Simply recording progress in some way helped to boost self-confidence toward future successes. There is neuroscience behind this thought process too. When one accomplishes something, it activates the reward centre of our brains, allowing us to feel a sense of pride. Specifically, the neurochemical dopamine is released and energises us with feel-good emotions. This chemical helps you to experience the feeling of getting rewarded and can hook you on wanting to achieve even more.

Reap the benefits of saying "thank you"

According to psychology professor, Robert Emmons, gratitude is a basic human requirement. Since we spend most of our time at the office, giving and receiving thanks at work is important.

Most people come to work every day, aiming to do a good job. What should they get in return? Businesswoman Mary Kay Ash famously said: "there are two things people want more than sex and money: recognition and praise."

What is wrong with recognising a job well done? Why not say thank you more often, and mean it? There are numerous scientifically supported studies, showing the benefits a simple "thank you" offers at an individual and an organisational level.

■ **Thanking employees increases productivity:** Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania discovered that grateful leaders motivate their employees to be more productive. In one study involving fundraising calls, employees who were thanked by their managers made 50% more fundraising calls than their co-workers.

■ **Gratitude improves well-being:** Many studies have linked gratitude to better physical health. Grateful people tend to have lower blood pressure, improved immunity and healthier hearts.

■ **Gratitude builds mental strength:** Studies conducted in 2008 show grateful people are more resilient. They are better equipped to manage stress and they experience fewer negative emotions, like resentment and envy.

■ **Generosity is contagious:** When leaders show appreciation and gratitude, there is likely to be a ripple effect. Studies show cooperative and altruistic behaviour spreads from person to person. Showing gratitude toward someone is likely to inspire that person to thank other people.

■ **Gratitude increases job satisfaction:** Research has linked gratitude to increased job satisfaction. When people feel appreciated and they show appreciation for what they have, they are more likely to be happy with their jobs.

Initiating the effort to make employees feel appreciated and included can reap great rewards in terms of performance, productivity and satisfaction of the entire team. At the end of the day, the principle is very simple: We all want to feel valued. So, next time that somebody does a job well done, say "thank you."

For high-performing teams, continual (self-propelled) learning is a way of life

"Teamwork should no longer be considered a group skill. It is an individual skill and a responsibility of everyone in the workplace." – Christopher Avery, The Leadership Gift

Teams are the backbone of the contemporary world of work. Exco teams run corporations. R&D teams build market share. Matrix teams break the traditional corporate hierarchy and redefine reporting structures.

High-performing teams, or Elite Teams, are crucial to the way modern corporations organise and execute their goals. Elite Teams aim for superior performance, which translates into a significant competitive advantage.

One of the many accelerators that mobilises high-performing teams towards optimum performance is a sense of personal responsibility. Each member of the team realises that he (or she) is an indispensable component of the gears that are driving success.

As such, each individual has to keep himself (or herself) in top form. Even if leadership provides adequate training to function effectively, team members of Elite Teams take personal responsibility for their own development.

Constructing an environment for self-propelled learning.

Self-propelled development entails a high level of psychological safety within the team.

Leadership needs to allow for a degree of adaptation, experimentation and innovation. This culture inevitably means the frequency of mistakes will increase. However, mistakes are like 'cognitive catalysts', says Organisational Psychologist Professor Beverly Alimo-Metcalfe. Mistakes challenge pre-set assumptions and stimulate the generation of new – and better – ideas.

Keeping team members engaged and energised should be a key point on the leaders' list. The higher the engagement and sense of achievement, the more motivated they will be to self-propel their progress.

To generate engagement and boost ownership, Forbes recommends that leaders create individual development plans, provide performance metrics and generate opportunities for team members to take on new responsibilities outside their job function. Give them discretion and autonomy over their tasks and resources.

Feedback should also be offered regularly and tied to data or examples, such as the performance metrics or the individual development plan. If feedback is implemented as a tool for growth and recognition – and not an instrument to knock the team member down – it will accelerate their self-motivated learning.

The opportunity to learn should be embedded in the team's flow of life.

Deloitte reports that learning is the top-rated challenge among 2019's Global Human Capital Trends. Prospective employees now rate the "opportunity to learn" as among their top reasons for accepting a position. To achieve the goal of (self-propelled) lifelong learning, Deloitte recommends embedding it both into the flow of work and the flow of life:

- Leadership needs to seek out opportunities to integrate real-time learning and knowledge management into the workflow. Technology will enable organisations to explore new approaches to virtual learning. Learning occurs in small doses, almost invisibly, throughout the workday.
- Management needs to make learning more personal and targeted to the individual. Team members should be able to learn on their own time. The opportunity to learn should be packaged and delivered in convenient modes. Here, technology can play an important role.
- As teams become more central in the delivery of more types of work, leadership should offer learning opportunities that support individuals (as members of teams), providing content and experiences specific to the context of a worker's team.

Many companies are rigid in their organisational structure and processes, which can make it challenging to implement cross-functional development and facilitate dynamic growth. Leadership has to bridge silos, knock down walls and design a system that encourages a fluid approach to learning.

Indeed, the modern workforce is used to change and enjoys open work environments that allow them to explore and develop.

Millennials will learn and develop… or they will leave.

Born between 1981 and 1996 (ages 23 to 38 in 2019), millennials are currently the largest segment in the workforce. And it is a force to be reckoned with. They want to work in small, high-performing teams that reach clear objectives. Moreover, they expect the company to offer learning and development opportunities throughout their careers.

According to The Deloitte Global Millennial Survey 2019, the majority of millennials feel that business has the most significant responsibility for preparing their workforce for Industry 4.0 (transformation due to digitisation and Artificial Intelligence).

The survey is based on the views of more than 13,000 millennials, questioned across 42 countries and territories, including South Africa.

The survey found that more than 28% of millennials plan to leave their current organisations in the next two years due to a lack of learning and development opportunities.

A whopping 74% of millennials will leave their current employer within the next five years because they do not provide a motivating and stimulating working environment.

These are not idle threats, Deloitte warns. About a quarter of those saying they would leave within two years reported leaving an employer in the past 24 months. This is a challenge for businesses in that it threatens a stable workforce.

Clear role definition is the starting point to self-propelled learning.

Despite varying approaches to describing high-performing teams, The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) says that some common characteristics seem to be reliable indicators of a team that is not functioning at its peak or that needs intervention. The list is long, but two points deserve special attention: lack of goal clarity and poorly defined roles and responsibilities. The primary precursor for a culture of self-development is clear role-definition.

When members are not clear about their individual and team goals, respectively, it results in a lack of commitment and engagement. When roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined, team members don't know how to demonstrate their commitment to the team and to support team success. The result is disempowerment, which leads to dissatisfaction and eventually erodes down to apathy.

Role confusion increases frustration and stress and potentially creates conflict in teams. In a study of multi-disciplinary teams, research shows that being clear about team members' roles markedly improves the team's engagement, self-motivation and performance.

A Rigorous selection process is part of the status of an Elite Team

Talent selection and identification are critical for the development of future elite-level performers. Hiring companies are continually pursuing top talent: individuals with a set of attributes which predispose them for a successful career in the company.

As teams are the mainstay in the modern world of work, it only makes sense to group top talent into high-functioning – or Elite – teams. However, merely adding top performers into one pot won't produce a symbiotic potion. The secret ingredient of a gelled unit is a robust selection process.

Meticulous selection is critical to a team's success. Nevertheless, hiring talent remains top of mind among CEOs' concerns. PWC's 2019 Annual Global CEO Survey reports that Chief Executives view the unavailability of expertise and skills as one of the top threats to their business.

When it comes to assessing potential candidates to join a team, research shows that a large number of organisations employ rudimentary and haphazard approaches to selecting their team members.

These hit-or-miss methods represent a severe disconnect for teams that aim to have a strategic focus on increasing their competitive advantage through effective talent management.

The disconnect, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) Foundation reports, "stems from the fact that many organisations fail to use scientifically proven assessments to make selection decisions."

Research has shown that the impact of an unfit hire will not only be felt financially but also by the effects that it will have on the existing employees.

In a review conducted by Robert Half International, 39% of CFOs surveyed said that bad hires had cost them productivity; 11% said a bad hire resulted in fewer sales. Respondents reported that supervisors spend 17% of their time – about one day per week – managing poorly performing employees.

The survey was based on interviews with more than 2 000 CFOs.

While leadership is spending the bulk of their time and resources in trying to correct the mistake of hiring the wrong person, the rest of the team often becomes disgruntled or disengaged.

Effectively employing scientifically vetted assessment methods can significantly enhance the quality and productivity of work teams. But not all the considered tools are helpful in every situation

Work samples and job knowledge, for example, can't be used to select candidates at entry-level who still need to go through a learning curve. In these situations, intelligence tests, integrity tests, peer ratings and structured interviews represent the most reliable options.

In a more out-of-the-box approach to assessment methods, Google and Marriot have even turned to gamification. Applicants get to experience what the tasks would be like by playing a game version of it. The objective is to offer the prospective team member a preview, making it clear what is challenging about the team's goals as well as what is exciting.

A scientific approach to talent identification also involves various decision-makers in selecting potential talent. A multidisciplinary team brings complementary skill sets to the selection process. Decision-makers can cross-check each other to ensure the selection process covers all basis. A diverse group of decision-makers is also an excellent countermeasure against bias or prejudice in the selection process.

An efficient recruitment process is an organisation-specific sourcing model that aims to find the right fit for the right position at the right time. It is a step-by-step approach to bringing in talented people who can help the company grow.

However, it is also essential to balance the prediction of future performance with current ability. If leadership only focuses on short-term wins, prospective team members' current ability might be their only concern. Successful talent identification sees into the future by identifying budding talent with high potential.

Additionally, Harvard Business Review states that organisations that don't check to see how well their practices predict the future quality of their hires lack in one of the most consequential aspects of modern business.

Tertiary degrees, certifications and years of work experience in no way indicate that an individual will be a high performer, McKinsey & Company proclaims.

Some research even suggests that Elite Teams most often comprise of members who have been selected for their can-do attitude and high potential, and not on skill (or, at least, not on skill alone).

For example, New Zealand's revered All Blacks rugby team select on character over talent. Some of New Zealand's most promising players never pull on the coveted jersey because they don't have the attitude that defines the team's spirit.

Moreover, the All Blacks team selection process is rigorous and thorough. It's not a secret. It's part of the team's Elite status. The All Blacks team still enjoys admiration around the world. Keeping this in mind, leaders should consider that being rigorous does not equate to being unapproachable or rude.

In today's competitive market for talent, a compelling employer brand is crucial to attracting the best candidates. LinkedIn research says that companies with great employer brands receive 50% more qualified applicants and see a 50% reduction in cost-per-hire.

With 75% of job seekers considering an employer's brand before even applying, an attractive brand may be the difference between finding the perfect person for the role – or losing them to a competitor.

Replace your annual reviews with real-time coaching

"People are realising that doing anything annually, whether it's a Performance Review, Engagement Survey or Goal-Setting, makes no sense." - Jim Barnett.

The mounting need for top talent, the pressure of dealing with global competitors and the complexity of Industry 4.0 have led corporations to rework their business structure into a team-based model. Renowned research indicates that the organisations who will stand the test of time will consist of dynamic networks of highly empowered teams.

At the very heart of this successful team-based business structure is agility. An agile system is nimble and propagates fluidity. A team's lifespan depends on its core objective. When the team has fulfilled its purpose, the unit may disband.

Members of the dispersed team are quickly absorbed into existing teams; others are reassembled into new teams with new objectives. One person might be part of many units simultaneously.

The system encourages information to flow freely and transparently. As a collective, the teams experience an almost tangible sense of psychological safety to ask for feedback and share knowledge.

Interconnected knowledge-sharing diminishes feelings of uncertainty. Robust feedback keeps people's work-related activities focused on personal, team-related and business goals: the more timeous and more direct the feedback, the better. Critique is invited and not perceived as a threat.

Leadership lights the torch and passes the light of critiquing

The ability to move between teams and share without risk is a critical attribute of high-performing – or Elite Teams.

An interconnected feedback system becomes the backbone of success. Positive feedback enables the team to learn and engage quickly, while constructive feedback allows for team members to change and optimise their ways of working. This also allows teams to review their objectives and if they are being met timeously.

The team spreads the fervour of the safe feedback system, but leadership lights the fire – and carries the torch forward. How leaders approach the (potential thorny) issue of criticism determines the culture of feedback throughout the entire team.

Feedback is the most critical gear in leadership's driving seat, says Professor Christine Porath, author of *Mastering Civility: A Manifesto for the Workplace.*

She explains that team members feel valued when leadership gives regular updates on personal performance and on how their contributions are benefitting the team. Directive feedback – coupled with support – provides guidance, leading people to grow into their roles and to feel more confident in their competence. A culture of feedback becomes the team's driving force.

Leadership models the ideal behaviour of 'stabbing in the front, not the back', a philosophy followed by the distinguished All Blacks rugby team. The phrasing, of course, is tongue-in-cheek. This viewpoint simply invites team members to robust communication and speaking freely.

The dreaded Annual Review

Practically speaking, feedback from leadership translates into the Annual Review.

On the surface, this measuring tool aims to create opportunities for learning and generate energy so critical for an Elite Team to thrive. However, the mere mention of the words – and related terms such as Performance Review or Annual Progress Evaluation – send shivers down our spines. Moreover, this negative connotation might not be so unjust.

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) reports that the "traditional performance reviews set up an uncomfortable dynamic between managers and employees in which one person is judge and jury for the other."

Neuroscientific research warns that this dynamic put team members on the defensive and result in a decline in performance – even for top-achievers.

Building on current performance and grooming future talent are both critical elements for organisations' long-term survival; traditional Annual Appraisals erode both, says Harvard Business Review.

With a substantial emphasis on (financial) rewards and reprimands – and their end-of-year structure – traditional performance reviews hold people accountable for past behaviour. This is at the expense
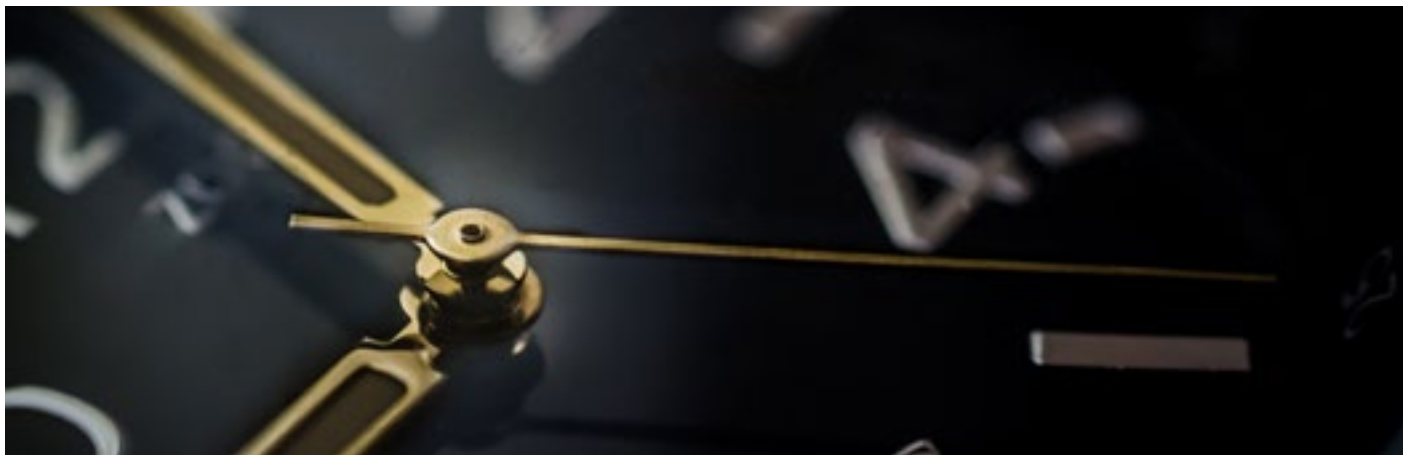
of improving current performance and grooming talent for the future.

In the Deloitte *2015 Global Human Capital Trends* report, 82% of companies stated that performance evaluations were not worth the time. A separate study reported that 41% of companies found widespread manager bias, and 45% believed performance evaluations did not motivate employees.

The traditional appraisal was designed in the 1970s, according to Deloitte. With the world of work changing at the speed of light, it's clear as day that the conventional feedback system is out of date.

Society is moving fast. The world of work is moving even faster. Leadership must keep up with the pace. Managers are starting to realise that doing *anything* annually, whether it's a Performance Review, Engagement Survey or Goal-Setting, makes no sense, says Jim Barnett, CEO and co-founder of *Glint,* a cloud-based employee engagement tool.

The shift to real-time performance management

In today's world of work, the need for performance feedback is real-time, continuous and multidirectional.

More than 90% of contemporary employees would prefer their manager to address oversights and learning opportunities immediately, says Wakefield Research. The *2017 Global Human Capital Trends* says that, informed by their experiences in social media, people want to get and give feedback regularly.

- In addition, several organisational changes have made developing a more agile process necessary:
- Team members expect continuous learning. New learning solutions are creating an "always-on" learning environment to support this need.
- Team members expect unbiased assessments. Important decisions about team compilations and role-definitions are getting more accurate through data. Data-driven appraisals ad value and drives performance cross-functionally – all the time, not just once or twice a year, or on specific projects.
- Businesses operate in teams, so performance management must be local. Practices that facilitate continuity in feedback empower local leaders, create better relationships among units and facilitate inter-team collaboration. High-performing teams implement continuous performance management to help organisations learn from high performers in real-time.

Quick, collaborating and coaching

Some companies have stepped away from traditional Performance Reviews completely, encouraging frequent manager-employee check-ins – quarterly, monthly or even weekly. This could be as simple as a short meeting or a coffee break. Digital tools can enable managers to touch base with employees continuously with minimal disruption.

The simple task of checking in team members frequently can increase employee productivity, says Kris Duggan, CEO and Co-founder of *BetterWorks*, a platform for setting, measuring, and cross-functional-ly aligning goals.

Some of the latest data analysed by his company suggest that "the direct reports of managers who check in on progress towards weekly goals are up to 24 times more likely to achieve them."

At its core, continuous performance management boils down to two elements: performance and engagement. Valuable performance management starts with aligned objectives, followed by frequent feedback, backed by continuous support and employee recognition. It's also encapsulated by personal and career development.

Coupled with the change approach to Performance Management is a change in the role of leadership: from bureaucratic to coaching. Research published by UNC's Kenan-Flager Business School found that today's labour force doesn't see their managers as experts the way their predecessors did.

Thanks to the digital age, people can consult several sources for expert opinions. Instead, team members look to their managers for coaching and mentorship and find purpose through continually learning and growing on the job. Managers need to adopt a coaching approach toward guiding their teams. Leadership, says Deloitte, is more important than ever but must be viewed through a new lens.

An emotional intelligent team fosters a healthy space for feedback

'A team can have everything going for it – the brightest and most qualified people, access to resources, a clear mission – but still fail because it lacks group emotional intelligence.' – Building the Emotional Intelligence of Groups, Vanessa Urch Druskat and Steven B. Wolff

Personality and emotions are hardwired in each of us. However, emotionally intelligent individuals choose their reactions to a stimulus. They learn to read and influence other people's feelings and opinions. In the high-performing teams, where relationships are part and parcel of the unit's success, helping employees develop this skill has big payoffs.

In their landmark research findings, published by Harvard Business Review as 'Building the Emotional Intelligence of Groups', Vanessa Urch Druskat and Steven B. Wolff emphasise how emotional intelligence underlies the productive processes of unbeaten teams.

Team emotional intelligence is more intricate than individual emotional intelligence as teams interact on multiple levels, says Druskat and Wolff. The team as an entity must be aware of each member's emotions, the group's collective sentiment, and the moods of other groups and individuals outside its boundaries.

Leadership should bring to life the necessary conditions in which team members can develop their emotional intelligence. Those conditions are 1) trust among members, 2) an awareness of group identity and 3) a sense of group efficacy.

Emotional intelligence cultivates assertiveness

Writing for Forbes, Michele Markey is a specialist in personal and professional development training. She guides managers to help build emotional intelligence in high-performing teams. Firstly, she says, leaders should themselves be self-aware and demonstrate pro-social behaviour. Then, they should create an atmosphere where team members have a voice and can express their feelings. However, explosive anger and/ or volatile frustration should not be the norm. Instead, leadership should encourage assertiveness.

Assertive means expressing oneself persuasively, standing up for one's point of view, while also respecting the rights and beliefs of others.

Assertiveness often doesn't come naturally to most people. However, a high-performing team consists of emotionally intelligent individuals who have mastered the art of this social competence.

An emotionally intelligent team that values assertiveness creates an open space for feedback.

Assertiveness bolsters team members to process (negative) feedback

Feedback - both positive and negative - is critical to helping team members enhance their best qualities and address areas of development. In their article 'What Good Feedback Really Looks Like', Craig Chappelow and Cindy McCauley say that "harsh feedback does not help people thrive and excel".

Instead, effective appraisals need to be delivered with respect and care. Frequent or exclusively negative comments can spark self-shielding reactions that dampen motivation and increases distrust. However, ignoring weaknesses is one of the most significant contributors to team derailments.

When appraisals focus only on strengths, team members are lulled into a false sense of confidence. It also gives leadership an easy way out towards fostering necessary — and sometimes tricky — development in their reports, which ultimately compromises the team's effectiveness.

Instead of encouraging people to avoid negative feedback, Chappelow and McCauley say that "we should focus on how to deliver negative feedback in ways that minimize the threat response."

They suggest delivering feedback using the Situation-Behaviour-Impact (SBI) model. The model addresses both strengths and weaknesses in a clear, specific, professional and caring way. Feedback providers first note the context in which behaviour occurred. Then they describe the action — what they saw and heard. The final step is to explain the impact the conduct had on the team's success.

Jennifer Porter, a corporate team coach writing for Harvard Business Review, says that leadership ought to include two more steps to the SBI model. The first is to give feedback on patterns of behaviour that leverage specific events as examples. Looking at patterns, Porter explains, assists in alleviating recency bias, where people tend to recall and over-estimate events in their short-term memory. The second is to suggest an alternative set of behaviours while simultaneously offering support to achieve that goal.

Leadership sets the pace with 360-degree feedback systems

While many of us struggle to hear it, constructive negative feedback serves as powerful fuel towards change. One must keep in mind that feedback is not an attack on one's identity; it is a learning opportunity where certain behaviours are being addressed. The Elite Team's collective mindset is always tuned in for feedback; they do not interpret it as personal confrontations.

Even leadership – and perhaps, especially leadership – of Elite Teams seek out their team's honest evaluation. Research published in the Journal of Personnel Psychology has found that 360-degree feedback recipients who get unfavourable ratings tend to improve their performance more than those who get measured favourably. To take it even further, the Centre for Creative Leadership has found that successful executives credit all types of potentially threatening events (for example, making a business mistake or losing star performers) as key drivers of their development.

Reacting to criticism

It's good to keep in mind that all feedback – even negative feedback – is a sign of interest and an indication that the team cares for each other's performance. Negative feedback is an excellent opportunity to prove maturity and to show cooperation. Writing for Forbes, leadership specialist Jacquelyn Smith suggests absorbing negative feedback using the following psychological techniques:

- **Own it and hone it.**
  Accept the feedback, reflect on it, then make the necessary changes.
- **Assume good intentions.**
  They are commenting on your work, not you as a person.
- **Use it as a chance to clarify expectations and goals around your position.**
  You might have not completely understood what was expected of you.
- **Treat negative feedback as an opportunity to bond with your manager.**
  If you're in a situation where you need help or support, this is the time to say it.
- **Utilise this opportunity to find a mentor.**
  Take charge of your development and find a mentor to back you.

Unfortunately, ineffectual leaders – or workplace bullies – do sometimes use unfair and overly negative feedback as a tool to demean and control others. In offering feedback, Chappelow and McCauley caution managers: leadership telling someone how to fix a problem is often the wrong approach. Leaders will foster more learning by asking questions that stimulate reflection and coaching team members into exploration and experimentation.

How an Elite Team is a biome to facilitate reaching full potential

As organisations become increasingly digital, they face a growing imperative to redesign themselves to move faster, adapt quicker and embrace the dynamic career of a younger talent pool.

A critical part of adapting to the digital world of work is moving to replace hierarchical organisational structures with models where work is accomplished in teams.

According to the Deloitte *2017 Global Human Capital Trends* report, only 14% of executives believe that the traditional organisational model – with hierarchical job levels based on expertise in a specific area – makes their business highly effective. In its place, leading companies are pushing toward a more flexible, team-centric model.

Deloitte describes this new mode of an organisation as 'a network of teams' with a high degree of empowerment, robust communication and rapid information flow. Moreover, it's sweeping organisations around the globe.

Top companies are built around systems that encourage teams to interconnect and to share information transparently. Also, individuals need to be able to move from team to team, depending on the issue they need to address.

The importance of teams in the world of work cannot be overstated. Teams exist in every organisation; most people will work within a team structure throughout their careers. Despite the growth of teams and teamwork in the modern organisation, a curiously low number of companies emphasises the importance of high-performing teams – or Elite Teams – as a decisive capability required for business success.

Merely working as a group doesn't automatically translate into working as a team. Real teamwork binds an assortment of individuals into a superorganism with a collective function. The team's focus transcends into a living, breathing biorhythm powered by collaboration, communication and acknowledgement of common purpose.

As each team member's potential is added as an ingredient, the collective cup starts running over with synergy. Team members' greatest strengths are concentrated at the right time to achieve the objective at hand.

With the right leadership at the helm, this high-functioning group evolves into an Elite Team. Each member cultivates fundamental confidence in their ability – as well as in that of their teammates – when pulled together. Team leaders examine individual strengths and place people in roles where they are likely to thrive and provide the most value.

Each member's fortes are being fully utilised. Their roles within the team are aligned to fit their expertise. (Along these lines, research even suggests the concept of engineering the work to fit the available talent.)

This alignment does not happen by chance: leaders need to assess and profile each team member individually. Profiles include not only strengths but also weaknesses and ways to grow their developmental areas.

The Elite Team is now an interdependent group of stable, role-defined individuals who share mutual trust, values, responsibility and a clear focus on a common goal. This powerhouse can outperform in anticipated productivity. Each individual is a crucial cog in the supermachine. This collective pool of potencies is a safety net to catch and replace individual weaknesses.

In essence, team members are more likely to reach their full potential by being part of this team.

Does this hold in all circumstances? Are there situations when opting for a single star performer over a well-functioning team is warranted?

In 2006, researchers Robert Huckman and Gary Pisano from Harvard Business School set out to determine these answers. Choosing a high-stakes scenario as the backdrop to their research questions, they put cardiac surgeons' success under the spotlight.

The research measured the success rates of more than 200 cardiac surgeons working in 43 different hospitals, explicitly examining the patient survival rates of highly experienced (freelancing) cardiac surgeons compared to those of surgical teams.

Huckman and Pisano analysed more than 38 000 procedures. Their findings were astonishing.

It turns out that the performance of individual heart specialists did improve significantly with practice and experience – but *only* at the hospitals where they usually worked.

When the same surgeons left their familiar teams to scrub up at a different hospital, their success rates returned to baseline.

This study suggests that working within a close-knit team of colleagues helps develop interactive routines that harness the unique talents of each team member.

Huckman and Pisano concluded that elite performance is not as portable as previously thought and is more a function of the "familiarity that a surgeon develops with the assets of a given organisation." Decoded, this means that even the star performers can only shine with the support of their colleagues and within the context of a high-functioning team.

FIGURE: The organisation of the future: Arriving now 2017 Global Human Capital Trends.

How things *were*

How things *are*

How things *work*

- Shared values and culture
- Transparent goals and projects
- Free flow of information and feedback
- People rewarded for their skills and abilities, not position

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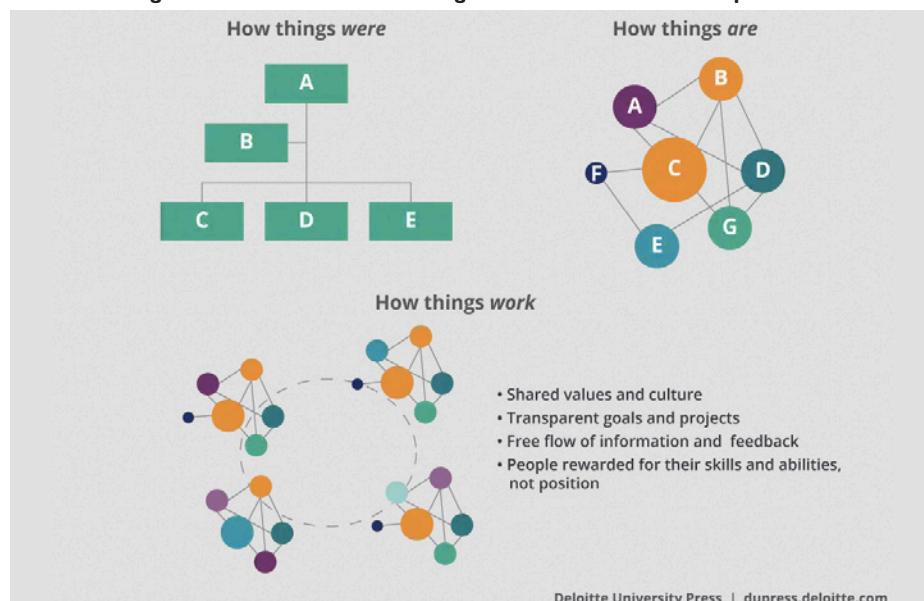
Values are worthless without collective buy-in

"If you're not willing to accept the pain real values incur, don't bother going to the trouble of formulating a values statement." - Patrick M. Lencioni, The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.

Teams that take their dynamic from functional to exceptional operate from the same mindset, says Roger Schwarz, an organisational psychologist and the author of *Smart Leaders, Smarter Teams.* Their collective goals are clear, which is driven by agreed-upon goals.

In high-performing – or Elite – teams, everyone pulls his weight in the same direction, fully aligned in towards reaching the collective goal. A shared set of values is the dynamo behind this energy.

It seems easy enough to construct a set of values, says Patrick Lencioni, guest writer for Forbes and author of *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.* Communication. Respect. Integrity. Excellence. These are all descriptive words which denote values; nobody can argue with their positive connotations. These are the corporate values of Enron, as stated in the business's 2000 annual report. And, as history has shown, they were hollow words on paper.

Lencioni says that many businesses view a values initiative in the same way they see a marketing launch: a onetime event measured by the initial attention it receives. Instead, they should be much more concerned about the authenticity of its content.

Cultivating core values is like making fine wine
For a values statement to be authentic, "it doesn't have to sound like it belongs on a Hallmark card," Lencioni explains. Some of the most values-driven companies feature robust and no-nonsense value statements. What's more, their value statements are distinctive and made-to-measure by the team, for the team.

To construct a respected values programme, leadership should approach cultivating the values in the same way a winemaker produces fine wine: do not try to rush it. The team needs to arrive at a statement which they willingly internalise.

Outlining a values statement in a silo and then instructing the team to follow it is seldom effective. Team members can't be *told* what to find meaningful. Research shows that when values are unveiled with all participants playing a role, those values are more likely to be unique to the team. The same study correlates unique values with better team performance.

All values are not created equal
Leadership should discuss values over several months and should consider (and reconsider) how the standards will play out within their corridors. Lencioni divides organisational values into four categories, saying that management should be aware of the most to the least strategic:

1 *Core values* are the deeply ingrained principles that guide all of a company's actions; they serve as its cultural cornerstones.
2 *Aspirational values* are those that a company needs to succeed in the future but currently lacks.
3 *Permission-to-play* values reflect the minimum behavioural and social standards required of any employee.
4 *Accidental values* arise spontaneously without being cultivated by leadership and take hold over time.

Permission-to-play values tend to not vary much across companies, particularly those working in the same region or industry. This set of values seldom contributes to distinguishing a company from its competitors.

Accidental values usually reflect the common interests or personalities of the organisation's employees. Accidental values can be positive, like when they create an atmosphere of inclusivity. However, they can also be damaging, foreclosing new opportunities. Managers need to distinguish core values from merely accidental ones, as confusing the two sets of values can be catastrophic.

In terms of aspirational values, the company may need to develop a new value to support a new strategy or to meet the requirements of a changing market or industry. As such, it's second in rank to core values. Carefully crafted core values are the source of a business's distinctiveness and must be protected at all costs.

An Elite Team weaves its core values into everything it does. Leadership integrates the core value statement into every employee-related process – recruiting and hiring methods, performance management systems, criteria for promotions and rewards, and even dismissal policies.

Deconstruct each value to the core elements
Genuinely understanding the chosen values is critical to implementation, says Amelia Friedman, a *Washingtonian Tech Titan*. Research indicates that team members who know and understands their values are 51 times more likely to be fully engaged in their work.

Even so, the most well-intentioned employee may misunderstand or misapply a value. Leadership needs to dig deep into each value, focussing on addressing questions like:
■ What does this value mean to us?
■ What does it look like in action?
■ How might it be misinterpreted?
■ How will we evaluate adherence to it?
■ How will it change our relationships or our interactions?

Synthesise your shared understanding into clear explanations of how you will practically live those values in the team.

During this process, leadership should task the team to nail down the precise wording and interpretations. Word choice is essential, says Friedman, since it will affect how the values are read and interpreted. When it comes to separating good teams from great ones, the phrasing of core values can take a team from performing well to high-performing.

Shared values propagate accountability
In high-performing organisations, Elite Teams operate as empowered networks. Decision authority is part and parcel of their set of core values. And, says Deloitte, decision authority and accountability go hand in hand.

Empowering the team to make decisions and relying on networks of connections doesn't mean that participants are no longer accountable for results. In fact, a primary objective of a system of teams is goal-setting to support success.

Accountability becomes more transparent and individual, and team goals are shared openly. Sharing creates a sense of responsibility which is critical to the team's (and the corporation's) effectiveness.

Deloitte has found that among 17 top practices in high-performing teams, the ability to clarify accountability – and define decision-making practices – features among the top drivers of outstanding results, including financial outcomes.

As a new project commences, leadership should facilitate a clear understanding of how each team member will be held accountable. The other side of the same coin is to empower the participants to perform together.

Mary Shapiro teaches organisational behaviour at Simmons College and is the author of the *HBR Guide to Leading Teams*. She recommends coming up with an "explicit agreement" about how the team will handle matters, like the division of labour and deadlines. When a team transcends its status from good to great to elite, it's because its members are operating from the same mindset. Everybody is clear about their shared values, norms and goals.

Inclusive team leadership: The sturdy mesh of safety and buoyancy

"The most essential work of the leader is to create more leaders." - Carsten Tams

One of the fundamental transformations in business today is the constant change away from hierarchical models of management.

Deloitte's *2019 Global Human Capital Trends* suggests that shifting toward a team-based organisational model improves performance, often significantly.

Companies are reinventing themselves to operate as networks of teams. While these organisations might have many senior leaders and functional departments, teams are fluid, and people move around rapidly. The organisation drafts the teams around mission, product, market, or integrated customer needs rather than a business function.

New units coagulate as new objectives come to the fore. Teams split apart when their project concludes; people slot into new roles to accommodate a new set of goals. Units are interconnected and share resources, intellectual capital, information and responsibilities.

Redefining leadership

The Past – Vertical Leadership

As leadership encourages its workforce to deliver across teams, it's sensible to evaluate corporate leadership throughout the entire company.

Traditionally, leadership has been envisaged around the idea of one person (the archetype *manager*) firmly in charge while the rest are simply followers (an approach termed *vertical leadership*).

However, the manager cannot be solely responsible for the team's success, says Mary Shapiro, author of the *HBR Review Guide to Leading Teams*. Not only is it impractical, but it's also one-sided. If the leader is the only one praising or critiquing, group dynamics suffer. Every member should be held accountable for mobilising the team and should be allowed to claim the team's victories.

The Evolution – Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive Leadership seems to be the logical shift in attitude. *Harvard Business Review defines* it as "leadership that assures that all team members feel they are treated respectfully and fairly, are valued and sense that they belong, and are confident and inspired."

Research by Deloitte confirms that teams with inclusive leaders are 17% more likely to report that they are high performing. About 20% are more likely to say they make high-quality decisions, and 29% are more likely to report behaving collaboratively.

However, the Inclusive Leadership model has an Achilles heel: the idea of Heroic Leaders.

The narrative of Heroic Leadership states that the drivers of change are an elite guiding coalition. The coalition consists of committed leaders with enough institutional power to force change through the organisation. They inspire followers by the power of their vision (transformational leadership), and they reinforce conformity by rewarding those who adopt desired behaviours (transactional leadership).

There is a better way. The Journal of *The Academy of Management Executive* encourages Shared Leadership as one of the distinguishing factors that differentiate a well-functioning team from a high-performing – or Elite – team.

The Revolution – Shared Leadership

Research published in the *Journal of Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice,* states that the leadership role in Elite Teams is shared by team leaders and team members alike. Allocation of the leadership role rotates to the person with apt knowledge, unique skillset and suitable abilities to solve the problem at hand.

In fact, research specifies that under-performing teams tend to be dominated by the team leader, while Elite Teams naturally display dispersed leadership (or Shared Leadership) patterns.

An evaluation of the literature defines Shared Leadership as a collaborative leadership practice involving members of the same team (and members of cross-functional teams) that mutually influence one another. They collectively share duties and responsibilities otherwise relegated to a single, central leader.

Shared Leadership occurs when all members of the teams are fully engaged in the leadership function of the unit. Colleagues are not hesitant to influence and guide their peers to maximise the potential of the team as a system.

The essence of Shared Leadership is that the group benefits from all members' different leadership capabilities. The team understands leading as a dynamic and multi-directional group process rather than a function operated by an elite few at the top. As such, the shared leadership model is ideal for enabling continuous and inclusive organisational change.

Shared Leadership entails a simultaneous, continuous and mutual influence process that is characterised by serial emergence of official – as well as unofficial – leaders. In this sense, shared leadership is a manifestation of fully developed empowerment in teams.

Locking the door on Key Person Dependency

In high-performing teams, the leadership role is not associated with a job title or individual; leadership is an influencing process. Moreover, Shared Leadership mitigates the risk of Key Person Dependency.

Key Person Dependency risk is a threat to the success and survival of the team as one person (or a handful of key people) is the primary driver of the team's triumphs. In Elite Teams, peers grow accustomed to holding – and handing over – the torch of leadership. Peers seamlessly pass the baton of authority in a fluid matrix and adapt as the environment changes.

How the safety net of the Shared Leadership system safeguards its members

New Zealand's renowned All Blacks Rugby Team offers an outstanding example of the triumphs brought forth by Shared Leadership.

Eight years ago, Stephen Donald was out on a fishing boat in Waikato, taking a load off, when he received a phone call. It would become a conversation written in the annals of rugby. Donald was called up after injuries to Dan Carter, Colin Slade and Aaron Cruden.

Not originally part of the squad, Donald thought that his career with the All Blacks was over. During a "very social six weeks," he had even gained 5 kilogrammes! Unexpectedly, Donald was drafted as the fly-half and kicked the winning points in the 2011 World Cup final.

As Donald was familiar with the team's systems, he could slot in seamlessly to fill a gap in the team's matrix and catapult them to victory.

How peer-to-peer feedback in high-performing teams transcends potential

The digital age, the pertinence of the Millennial workforce and the diversity of global trade are driving a new organisational flexibly. High performing companies are amending their business structures, shifting from the traditional functional hierarchy towards a network of teams.

The system of interconnected units is fluid, with people moving from team to team rather than remaining in static formal configurations. This new model of work is obliging leadership to reconsider assumptions about feedback, appraisals and sharing of knowledge as keys to performance.

Traditional Performance Management is being turned on its head
The *2017 Global Human Capital Trends* reports that, across industries and geographies, many companies are redesigning performance management. The new performance approach wants to improve discussions, create frequent check-ins and facilitate a culture of development.

Hierarchically structured businesses were developed around traditional management thinking, says Stacia Sherman Garr, in which leaders "tell people what to do, set goals, and create standards."

Garr is a researcher and thought leader on talent management, leadership, diversity and inclusion, people analytics, and HR technology.

In contrast, she says, in the model of an interconnected network of teams, goals are set at the bottom. Leaders are evaluated by team performance and not span of control, and Performance Management occurs continuously rather than once per year.

Thus, Performance Management is transforming from boosting an individual employee's performance to improving the results of the team. If the team wins, the employee wins. If the team wins, the company wins.

Psychological safety is the precursor of non-threatening peer-to-peer assessment
To prevent silos from obstructing success, and to mobilise collective thinking, management should overtly motivate team members to seek feedback from each other.

Providing feedback isn't exclusively the team leader's responsibility, says Mary Shapiro who lectures in organisational behaviour and is the author of *the HBR Guide to Leading Teams*. Management needs to set an expectation of shared leadership responsibility within the team.

Leaders should also put structures in place to facilitate intra-team (and inter-team) learning. Pooling cerebral capacity amalgamates numerous different vantage points into one narrative.

Interconnected feedback opens a whole new dimension of scope. It offers a birdseye view of relationships between elements to identify patterns. At the same time, it also deconstructs a narrative to allow thought experiments with different possibilities.

Trust is the axis of genuine interconnected feedback, says Paul Santagata, Head of Industry at Google. Emotional safety is the precursor to trust.

A vast two-year study on team performance confirmed that high-performing – or Elite Teams have one thing in common: psychological safety. The confidence that they won't be penalised when they make a mistake.

Moreover, research shows that psychological safety facilitates appropriate risk-taking, robust communication, assertiveness and creativity amongst team members. When people speak their minds, they challenge each other. When the culture is challenging but not threatening, teams can sustain the broaden-and-build mode.

Broaden-and-build: cultivating inter-team and cross-functional feedback
The broaden-and-build mode paves the way towards a culture of comfortability with critique within the team. Feedback amongst fellow team members become the norm and is not perceived as threatening. Team members are comfortable to share their evaluation without being prompted to do so. The other side of the same coin is that team members are also self-motivated to ask for assessment and support.

Asking for feedback disarms potential conflict, illuminates blind spots in communication skills and models fallibility. These factors increase trust amongst peers.

Cross-functional team feedback amongst peers expand the entire organisation's learning spectrum – and opportunities for growth – even further. Inter-team feedback sets the various teams up for a myriad of interchangeable scenarios. For example, a member who is a follower in one group might be in a (provisional) leadership role in another (temporary) task unit.

Cross-functional team feedback between peers also promotes interpersonal understanding, breaks stereotypes and builds camaraderie.

Kenan Flagler Business School says that team members who feel closely connected, and who have had the opportunity to learn about each other's goals, are more likely to understand the role each team member plays.

In turn, this makes it more likely that they will plan their work together. Individual personalities gel; informal groups within the team may pull forces to solve a singular problem which overlaps on each of their to-do lists. This kind of collaboration enables the team members to maximize their individual and collective goal attainment, leading to stronger performance.

The benefits of informal and ongoing peer-to-peer feedback
Feedback between team members can take on a formal and informal structure. The official peer review has its place in an Elite Team, but research is definitive on the power of informal feedback amongst fellow team members. It strengthens trust between team members as well as between team members and leadership. It not only authorises the team as a unit but also empowers each of its members; it demonstrates leadership's belief in the members' professional abilities and self-regulation.

Leadership shares some of the managerial pressure with the team, evening out the balance of power. Self-regulation compels the team to empathise with leadership's concerns and interests.

It also offers a certain degree of discretion – if somebody is battling with a specific problem, that person might not feel comfortable sharing their predicament with the entire team, or with management. Instead, the individual facing the impediment could consult with a specific team member, or members, who will be able to help them resolve the issue discreetly.

The digital revolution helps teams stay aligned. A successful feedback network brings together disparate information on customers or products to give team members integrated data on performance in real-time. Teams use mobile apps to share goals, keep up to date, communicate concerns and build a shared culture. Additionally, team members are empowered to make and act on decisions based on shared information.

Elite Teams create and practice an open feedback culture. They provide and receive evaluations habitually – regardless of position and tenure. Critique is handled in a way that improves the team's effectiveness and deepens their relationships.

Leadership can set the pace by overtly asking for feedback from team members, responding with positivity when they receive it, and incorporating the feedback into work behaviours.

Inclusive decision making unlocks team potential

"It's really, really important to surround yourself with a team whose opinions you trust, who are not in any way frightened to disagree with you."- Anna Wintour, Vogue Editor-in-Chief.

Many companies either ignore or lack adequate decision-making processes, says the *International Journal of Information Technology & Decision Making.* As businesses are increasingly organising themselves into networks of teams, this drawback is also prevalent in corporate teams.

Since physical boundaries do not constrain the modern world of work, strategic initiatives are run by teams of members drawn from around the company. Teams include colleagues from different functions, different business units – even different countries. As individual members' interests don't align perfectly by default, at least some misalignment is to be expected.

However, without a clear plan to untie this knot, the evil trio of conflict, poor participation and postponement rear their heads.

The loudest voice starts to carry the most substantial decision-making power. At this point, a senior executive usually steps in, autocratically imposing a solution. Bob Frisch, writing for *Harvard Business Review*, calls this the 'dictator-by-default syndrome'.

The highhanded dynamic of the dictator-by-default syndrome switches off team members' vigour to participate, creating a significant risk of apathy and poor execution. The remedy is implementing a proven decision-making process.

The basic building blocks of an inclusive decision-making process
Referencing a clear decision-making framework will circumvent the dictator-by-default syndrome within a few steps. Firstly, the dialogue should begin with a consensus on what outcome the team is trying to achieve.

In the absence of clearly articulated goals, members will make assumptions based on unspoken – often widely differing – premises, creating a condition that is ripe for failure.

Secondly, roles need to be very clearly defined. RAPID is a practical framework to ensure everybody understands what leadership – and their teammates – expects of them. Briefly unpacking the acronym (the group starts with the Problem Statement), each letter represents the following:

Problem Statement
R = Who is **Recommending** alternatives?
A = Who must **Agree** with the decision?
P = Who is going to **Perform** the action required?
I = Who will give **Input** of critical facts and data?
D = Who will make the final **Decision**?

Team members can fulfil multiple roles – especially in small teams – but if any tasks are left unfilled, decision quality will suffer.

Thirdly, participants need to come to the conversation well-prepared. Teams cannot make decisions with incomplete information. Participants should be presented with appropriate data and verified facts to facilitate an informed decision-making process.

Also, management should nip rumours and hearsay in the bud and set the record straight on any misconceptions.

Good teams master the art of a robust decision-making process. Great teams exceed the expectations and internalise the routine. High-Performing – or Elite – teams transcend the practise and mould it to form.

Elite Teams build customised decision-making frameworks
Elite Teams select elements from proven decision-making frameworks and melt them down into a new structure. High-performing teams seldom conform to a fixed decision-making recipe. Each team's set of guidelines is unique and tailored.

Additionally, the decision-making scaffolding is bendable and allows for reassembly if the scenario dictates a quick change of direction.

Elite Teams are responsive, concerted and empowered to make decisions.

In a high-performing team, the project manager is not the only accountable decision-maker. Rather, he or she takes on the role of a facilitator or coordinator for the unit. Thus, leadership enables decision making between all team members and does not make final judgements unilaterally.

Leadership's responsibility is to create an orchestrated concert by which all participants are engaged, including leadership itself. Team members are willing to take on tough decisions and see them through. With the organisation's best interest at heart, individuals are open to change and are prepared to do what is best for the collective.

The structure of the team is flexible, with team members taking on interchanging roles to gain new experiences. Consequently, team members feel comfortable to voice their opinions and share their inputs without fear of dismissal.

As the Elite Team self-organise, all team members contribute, with decisions made collaboratively. These decisions not only include identifying problems (and proposing solutions), but also generating innovative ideas.

Research found that Elite Team members are often involved in decisions outside of their traditional skill areas owing to their self-organising, flexible team structure. If the situation calls for it, High-Performing teams may also make swift decisions to maintain task momentum, even though these judgements may sometimes be reversed later, once further information becomes available.

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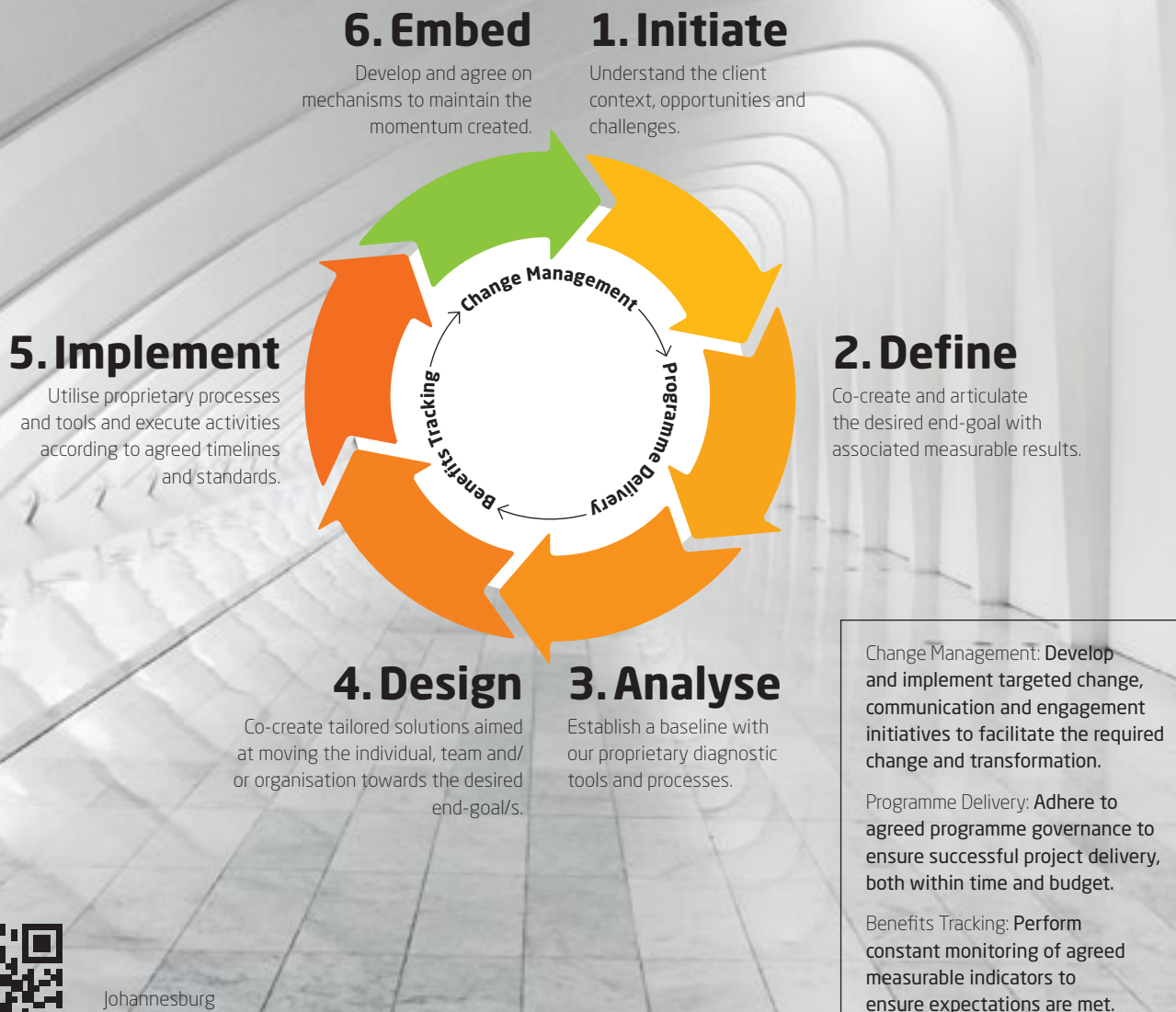
About this publication

Our Methodology

We follow a phased approach in the development and implementation of tailored solutions aimed at the individual, team and/ or organisational level. All our solutions are supported by integrated change management, effective programme delivery and comprehensive benefits tracking.

6. Embed
Develop and agree on mechanisms to maintain the momentum created.

1. Initiate
Understand the client context, opportunities and challenges.

5. Implement
Utilise proprietary processes and tools and execute activities according to agreed timelines and standards.

2. Define
Co-create and articulate the desired end-goal with associated measurable results.

Change Management

Programme Delivery

Benefits Tracking

4. Design
Co-create tailored solutions aimed at moving the individual, team and/ or organisation towards the desired end-goal/s.

3. Analyse
Establish a baseline with our proprietary diagnostic tools and processes.

Change Management: **Develop and implement targeted change, communication and engagement initiatives to facilitate the required change and transformation.**

Programme Delivery: **Adhere to agreed programme governance to ensure successful project delivery, both within time and budget.**

Benefits Tracking: **Perform constant monitoring of agreed measurable indicators to ensure expectations are met.**

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