

Develop High-Performance Teams



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Topics:

- Clarifying team roles and functions
- Communication
- Co-operation and collaboration
- Decision-making
- Empowerment and team performance

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Clarifying team roles and functions

Everybody in a team or workgroup knows and executes their roles and functions. Right? Yes and no. Ask each person if they know what their roles and functions are and they will mostly answer yes. Ask them if they execute them effectively and they will still mostly answer yes. Ask them if others know and execute their roles and functions effectively and you will get some very different answers. Ask them if everybody does the team things and you will get also get some very different answers.

As the late and great Professor Julius Sumner Miller used to ask, “Why is it so?” The checklist below will go some way to answering this question.

Providing your people with an accurate, up-to-date position or job description is important. But what’s more important is their interpretation of the words on their position or job description. And their interpretation of what is required from them by way of teamwork. One way to check your people’s interpretation of their roles and functions is to go through them with each person and ask them to explain their understanding of what the words mean to them. The other way is to monitor their performance and check for deviations from what is required. The first way may reduce any deviations.

High-performance teams have better clarity, understanding and agreement on the roles and functions of the members of their team or workgroup. They also have greater alignment in their perceptions of how well everybody executes their roles and functions. Phew. That’s a tough ask.

In relation to your team or workgroup, think about the actions below and decide which actions are not happening or could be improved in relation to **clarifying roles and functions**.

Select up to 3 actions that need improvement. Specify what needs to happen, what could be done better? Then decide what actions that you need to initiate.

Record on your action plan – what, with whom, by when, status or next action, etc

Add to your ‘to do’ list or weekly planner.

Initiate actions.

Update your action plan.

Repeat the process with any other actions needing improvement.

Here is a checklist to explore the extent to which roles and functions are clarified. If you have a workgroup, but not a team, then check which of these are absent.

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Consider the checklist below and answer the questions: What needs to happen? What could we do better? What do I need to do?

- The need for and benefits of having individual 'team performance' roles and functions clearly defined or reviewed are discussed and agreed.
- Roles and functions and what is expected from us regarding our contribution to team performance are clarified and applied.
- The workgroup/team leader's role and functions and workgroup/team expectations of that role are clarified and aligned.
- Tasks are allocated fairly and in relation to competence to ensure that the workload is not contributing to unacceptable performance.
- The required team performance standards and expectations of each position within the workgroup/team are clarified, accepted and applied.
- The team role for each position is documented and discussed with and agreed by each workgroup/team member.
- We agree who performs key functions, who is consulted, who is advised of the result, who provides the information who makes the decision.
- All workgroup/team members are aware of the team performance role and requirements of other positions.
- We review team performance roles on an ongoing basis - each time a new employee is appointed, new roles are allocated, people leave, people take leave, restructuring occurs, new strategic plans are developed or every 12 months as a minimum.
- We have the required resources, support, knowledge, skills and motivation to perform our individual and team roles.
- Individuals are clear on what they have to do in order to produce the team outputs. Each person produces their output to the agreed standards.
- We have the right mix of people and are able to influence the achievement of team performance outcomes.
- We engage in cross-skills training and perform the roles of others when required.
- Management do what needs doing to support the clarification of team performance roles and functions.

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Communication

Communication is the lifeblood of every business/organisation and team. Teams or workgroups thrive and prosper on a diet of effective communication. In the absence of effective communication, people will speculate and form their own opinions about many of the issues which affect their motivation and work performance.

Unfortunately, this usually results in rumours, half-truths, distortions, misinterpretations and a general lack of understanding. And this can have a detrimental effect on individual and team performance. Most of us have heard of the 'Mushroom' approach to organisation communication. Keep them in the dark and feed them bullshit. Works for growing mushrooms, not so good for growing people.

What your people talk about when you are around and when you are not around could be very different. One of your challenges as a leader is to close that gap.

How effective are the communications that affect your team or workgroup?

In relation to your team or workgroup, think about the actions below and decide which actions are not happening or could be improved in relation to **communication**.

Select up to 3 actions that need improvement. Specify what needs to happen, what could be done better? Then decide what actions that you need to initiate.

Record on your action plan – what, with whom, by when, status or next action.

Add to your 'to do' list or weekly planner.

Initiate actions.

Update your action plan.

Repeat the process with any other actions needing improvement.

Here is a checklist to explore the extent to which communication within your team is effective. If you have a workgroup, but not a team, then check which of these are absent.

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Consider the checklist below and answer the questions: What needs to happen? What could we do better? What do I need to do?

- The reasons for and the benefits of improving internal and external communication are agreed.
- We explore where, how, when, with whom and why communication is breaking down.
- The nature, format and timing of the communication requirements of all team members are agreed and effectively provided.
- The nature, format and timing of individual communication needs, where they differ from the team, are agreed and effectively provided.
- Our instructions, requests and directions are clear and concise.
- We consult with other areas to agree our and their communication requirements.
- Ways to improve communication with other areas that affect the way we do our work are explored and followed through.
- The causes of instances where communications are untimely, inaccurate or insufficient are identified, explored and resolved.
- Pending changes are discussed as soon as we are aware of them.
- We seek co-operation from higher levels/other areas in relation to the nature, format and timing of communications we require from them.
- Formal lines of communication between us and our internal customers/suppliers are established and followed.
- Feedback is sought from our internal and/or external customers so we can find, develop and implement new and better ways to function as a team.
- We receive information regularly about our customers' requirements and about any changes they may have. We use this information to ensure we are satisfying their needs and requirements.
- The positive and negative consequences of the methods we use to communicate - both formally and informally – are discussed and incorporated into improvements.
- We check to see what actions or information are required to assist our day-to-day operations.
- We discuss 'grapevine' issues or rumours with both management and team members.
- We seek information from others on issues about which we are unclear.
- The strategies and key objectives of our area and individual contributions are clarified and communicated.
- We seek feedback on ways to improve our personal communication style.

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- We consult with others about decisions which will affect them before the decision is made.
- We take responsibility for our own communication needs.
- Information flow between team members and the team leader (both ways) is effective.
- New, different and better ways to improve communication are implemented and followed through.

“No talent in management is worth more than the ability to master facts - not just any facts, but the ones that provide the best answers. Mastery thus involves knowing what facts you want; where to dig for them; how to dig; how to process the mined ore; and how to use the precious nuggets of information that are finally in your hand. The process can be laborious - which is why it is so often botched.”

Robert Heller, Editor, Management Today

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Co-operation and collaboration

Do you have a team or workgroup? Many work groups who call themselves teams, don't actually function as real teams. A workgroup is a collection of individuals who, by and large, look after their own individual interests, needs and wants without much or any consideration for the collective interests, needs and wants.

A team is a group of people that share a common purpose and who are dependent on others in the team to do their job effectively so that they can do their job effectively. Their individual roles, functions or tasks might be very different, but these will all contribute to the team purpose – why the team exists. If you have somebody in your team whose role, functions or tasks have no connection with anybody else in your team, you might ask the question why are they part of your team?

Now the answer to that question may simply be that they perform a specialist function and there is no obvious team to which they can be attached. And you may have a group of people who all perform specialist functions who are totally independent of each other. If that is your case, then the only team requirement may be simply be for social intercourse in the workplace. And this can be very important.

In relation to your team or workgroup, think about the actions below and decide which actions are not happening or could be improved in relation to **co-operation and collaboration**.

Select up to 3 actions that need improvement. Specify what needs to happen, what could be done better? Then decide what actions that you need to initiate.

Record on your action plan – what, with whom, by when, status or next action.

Add to your 'to do' list or weekly planner.

Initiate actions.

Update your action plan.

Repeat the process with any other actions needing improvement.

Review this checklist if you would like to improve how you co-operate and collaborate.

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Consider the checklist below and answer the questions: What needs to happen? What could we do better? What do I need to do?

- We explore the need for and discuss the benefits of improving co-operation/collaboration.
- We know how individual roles impact on others within the team.
- We identify and discuss how what we each do contributes to the workflow process for others in the team.
- We ask other team members what we need to do to help them do their job to the required standard.
- We explain to other team members what they need to do to help us do our jobs to the required standard.
- New, different and better ways to help us achieve others' requirements of us are explored and implemented.
- We identify where and when better co-operation/collaboration is needed between individuals or areas.
- We have effective discussions about how we can work better together and we implement the suggestions.
- We have effective discussions about how we are working well together so we can maintain these actions and behaviours.
- Each of us have a genuine concern for each other and we willingly help our fellow team members in performing their individual and team tasks.
- Feedback is provided when co-operation/collaboration is poor or breaking down.
- People in other areas with whom we have a working relationship are informed about any changes/issues that will directly or indirectly affect them.
- We acknowledge and thank team members who work to improve co-operation/collaboration within our team.
- The impact and consequences of poor co-operation/collaboration between individuals are explored and resolved.
- We provide feedback to the team on how we have helped others to see if they too could benefit.
- We analyse what we do that might be counter-productive to co-operation/collaboration.
- We ask others what we do that is counter-productive to other team members.
- The best ways to change the way we do things to improve co-operation/collaboration are explored and implemented.

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- We check that the new changes now become a standard practice for the way we work as a team.
- We discuss with management the support required to implement changes to improve co-operation/collaboration.

‘The superior man encourages the people at their work, and exhorts them to help one another.’

I Ching: Book of Changes, China, c. 600 B.C.

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Decision-making

Who decides what? Who calls the shots in your team or workgroup? When do you make the decision? When do you let your workgroup make the decision? How effective are you as a decision maker according to your team or workgroup? Is everybody clear on who has responsibility for making which decisions? How much autonomy do you give to your people when it comes to making decisions? Do decisions that need to be made slip through the cracks because people are waiting on someone else to make the decision? (Or are you struggling with, “I can’t decide whether I am decisive or not?”).

The two major problems when it comes to decision-making are:

Procrastination – the decision takes too long. Now this gets a bit tricky because your people are not fully aware of all the choices and consequences that you have to consider before you make a decision. Don’t keep them in the dark – remember that they will come up with their own reasons why you have not made a decision that, from their perhaps uninformed perspective, is taking too long. Unless it is counter-productive to do so, explain the choices and consequences. Inform them as much as you can

The wrong decision – the decision is made without consideration of all the choices and all the associated consequences. Don’t get stuck in ‘paralysis by analysis’, but involve your people in identifying all the stakeholders who can be affected by a decision, the options available and the positive, neutral or negative consequences on those stakeholders of each option. This will help you make the best decision.

In relation to your team or workgroup, think about the actions below and decide which actions are not happening or could be improved in relation to **decision making**.

Select up to 3 actions that need improvement. Specify what needs to happen, what could be done better? Then decide what actions that you need to initiate.

Record on your action plan – what, with whom, by when, status or next action, etc

Add to your ‘to do’ list or weekly planner.

Initiate actions.

Update your action plan.

Repeat the process with any other actions needing improvement.

Here are some things to do to improve decision-making within your workgroup - not in any particular order. Be guided by your own circumstances.

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Consider the checklist below and answer the questions: What needs to happen? What could we do better? What do I need to do?

- The types of decisions to be made by team members are identified, discussed and agreed.
- Who is accountable for making what decisions is identified and applied.
- The levels of authority that people have in relation to making decisions is identified and agreed.
- Why team members may be unwilling to make decisions is explored and resolved.
- The consequences of making a wrong decision are explored and accepted.
- Examples of how to make particular decisions are explored within the team.
- We have the competence and confidence to use an agreed decision making process.
- We train people in how to think beyond the obvious issues – show them questions to ask which force them to think differently.
- We identify and agree the needs and interests of key stakeholders who could be affected by a decision.
- We discuss team members' perceptions of their decision-making responsibility.
- Situations where people did not make expected decisions are identified and discussed.
- We explore and agree why it is important that team members take more responsibility for making decisions.
- Feedback is provided on the quality and effectiveness of our decision-making.
- We explore the consequences of the various options available in relation to a particular decision.
- The consequences of not making a decision are known and accepted.
- We explain the context and rationale behind decisions that we have made.
- We agree the types of decisions where input from the team is desirable.
- We agree the types of decisions which the leader will make without input from the team.
- We explore the nature of the support people need to improve their willingness and competence in decision-making.

And below is one of my favourite quotations.

Paul Kruger (1825 – 1904), President of the Transvaal, once decided a dispute between two brothers about an inheritance of land in South Africa by announcing, "Let one brother divide the land, and let the other have first choice."

Edward Frank Allen, *Modern Humour for Effective Speaking* (Citadel, 1945)

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Empowerment and team performance

People have been ‘empowered’ to degrees more or less for ages. Dictionary definitions tell us that empower means to give or delegate power or authority. Astute managers have been doing this for donkey’s years. It’s just that the employees didn’t know that they had just been empowered. Not so long ago, the word ‘empowerment’ wasn’t part of management jargon. So, these days, employees are now empowered. You still with me?

In today’s management jargon, empowerment still involves the transfer of power and authority. But it has the added dimension that the manager or team leader acts to enable their people to do what they have to do to the required standard. This means that you manage the external factors that affect the performance of your people, as best you can. You do your best to create the best external factors or mitigate the impact of external factors beyond your control which have a detrimental effect on your people. Much harder, you manage the internal factors that affect the performance of your people, as best you can.

What does empowerment look like for you and your team or workgroup?

In relation to your team or workgroup, think about the actions below and decide which actions are not happening or could be improved in relation to **empowerment**.

Select up to 3 actions that need improvement. Specify what needs to happen, what could be done better? Then decide what actions that you need to initiate.

Record on your action plan – what, with whom, by when, status or next action.

Add to your ‘to do’ list or weekly planner.

Initiate actions.

Update your action plan.

Repeat the process with any other actions needing improvement

Here is a checklist to explore the extent to which your people feel empowered to contribute to team performance. If you have a workgroup, but not a team, then check which of these are absent.

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Consider the checklist below and answer the questions: What needs to happen? What could we do better? What do I need to do?

- We are empowered to deliver the required standard of team performance.
- If genuine mistakes occur, we encourage learning and improvement without blame.
- We openly discuss our attitudes and beliefs about team performance.
- We regularly assess our assets and liabilities in delivering outstanding team performance and apply remedial action.
- Our work environment contributes to the provision of outstanding team performance.
- People are clear on unacceptable behaviours which impede teamwork and team performance.
- We encourage people to be responsible for the consequences of decisions they make that affect team performance.
- We encourage people to find resolutions to problems they are capable of resolving.
- We avoid sarcasm and putting others down when people are attempting to improve team performance.
- We challenge negative group-talk about issues affecting team performance.
- We feel empowered to say “No” where appropriate.
- We feel empowered to identify and raise team performance issues.
- We feel empowered to suggest improvements to team performance.
- We feel empowered to always follow correct procedures (no pressure to cut corners).
- We are appropriately consulted and involved in decisions affecting our team performance.
- We are trusted to make decisions and act appropriately within the scope of our role.
- We are clear about where and in whom authority is vested.
- The information we need to work effectively is received and applied.
- We are aware of our own and other team members’ responsibilities to the team.
- We respect the differing accountabilities of team members through our support and co-operation.
- We take responsibility for team performance outcomes.
- We act to develop teamwork and to develop our own skills and knowledge in how to work as a high- performance team.

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“Hire the best. Pay them fairly. Communicate frequently.

Provide challenges and rewards. Believe in them.

Get out of their way – they’ll knock your socks off.”

May Ann Allison, Vice President, Citi Corp and Eric Anderson, Financial writer, *Managing Up, Managing Down* (Simon & Schuster, 1984)