

Develop High-Performance Teams



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Topics:

- Individual differences
- Individual responsibility
- Leadership and team performance
- Learning and development
- Managing change



Individual differences

Recognising and utilising individual differences.

The performance or output of a team or workgroup is proportional to the sum of the individual competencies. What the...? Translated, that statement means that $1 + 1$ can equal 3 or more. And another way of saying this is that two (or more) heads are better than one. Usually, not always. Have you heard of the concept of 'group think'? Google 'Bay of Pigs' to get an example of group think gone wrong.

$1 + 1$ can equal 3 or more provided that people have engaged in discussion where people are not afraid to voice dissenting opinions, have a unified purpose, a unified strategy, a unified commitment, and a willingness to accept other points of view.

Teams are made up of individuals who have differing temperaments, differing preferences, needs and wants, differing competencies and differing motivations.

So the tricky task for you is to foster teamwork while recognising and utilising individual differences and balancing individual needs with team needs. Phew! Another hard 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 **recognising and utilising individual differences**.

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 group or team recognises and utilises individual differences. If you have a workgroup, but not a team, then check which of these are absent.

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

- We have the autonomy to use our talents and skills to help the team succeed and we do everything we can to utilise them.
- We feel free to openly express ideas and opinions and they are discussed appropriately.
- We are able to do our tasks in our own individual way as long as we produce the results to the required standard.
- We have a tolerance within the team to hear opposing opinions and use them effectively.

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- We change our communication style with one another to ensure we can be 'heard'.
- We have a tolerance for different work styles and use these differences effectively.
- We are willing to let the most appropriate person take charge at different times within our team.
- We have a willingness and readiness to share leadership within the team.
- 'Off the wall' and creative ideas are encouraged, expressed and explored for the most effective solution.
- We have perseverance within the team so we are able to see things through to the end.
- Our ideas are presented assertively and persuasively both within, and external to, the team, ensuring our ideas are supported and resourced.
- We are able to clearly express our thoughts so they are understood and fully discussed, allowing the full exploration of individual issues and concerns.
- We have the ability to adapt individual roles within the team to gain the most from individual strengths and needs.
- Our team climate is one of respect and empathy for individual differences so that within the team our relationships are open and honest.
- Changes are dealt with positively and productively - we take into account people's needs and differences when we implement changes.
- Our team policies and values encourage individual uniqueness so that individuals are fully engaged with the team.

"We owe almost all our knowledge not to those who have agreed, but to those who have differed."

Charles Caleb Colton *Lacon* (1825), 2.121.

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Individual responsibility

“It’s not my responsibility”. How many times do you hear that as you travel down the highway of work life? Who is responsible for what within your team or workgroup? Who performs the action? Who needs to be consulted for their opinion? Who makes the decision? Who provides information and/or resources? Who is advised of the action/outcome? Who is not involved in any way?

The answers to these questions should be clarified for all key functions and tasks performed by your team or workgroup.

When things go wrong, as they will from time to time, you will hear people say things like, “It’s not my fault” or, “Don’t look at me. I didn’t do it” or “That’s not my job”. Again, this is another aspect of the human condition in the workplace. Which means don’t sweat on it when this aspect kicks in, just use this as a sign that you need to do some work on individual responsibilities.

You are accountable for the performance of your team or workgroup, and they are responsible for their performance.

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 **individual responsibility**.

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 individual responsibilities are clarified, accepted and executed. If you have a workgroup, but not a team, then check which of these are absent.

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

- Each person’s individual key responsibilities are clarified and performed to the best standard.
- Responsibilities common to all are clear and performed to the best standard.
- Individual responsibilities that appear to get neglected or overlooked are addressed.
- The consequences on others when individual responsibilities are neglected or overlooked are explained.
- We explore the reasons why individuals may not perform their responsibilities.
- We coach/train those people who appear to neglect individual responsibilities.
- The unique responsibilities of different roles are clarified and accepted.

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- We use a 'responsibility and accountability' matrix which clarifies who is responsible and accountable for what. (See below).
- We identify areas where responsibilities overlap and agree who has primary responsibility.
- We check that people's perceptions of their responsibilities reflect any new initiatives or changed circumstances.
- We agree how we will follow through on any responsibilities we may have neglected.
- Situations where the circumstances have changed but individuals have not altered their roles accordingly are explored and resolved.
- Each person has the required resources, support, knowledge, skills and motivation to deliver their responsibilities.
- We each understand and appreciate the difficulties associated with the responsibilities of other team members.
- The context, space, and boundaries are defined for each role.
- The level of direction and support each person requires is appropriate to the situation and reflects the level of competence of the individual.

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Responsibility and accountability matrix

List all key functions/outputs (vertical) performed/achieved by the team

List all names of team members (horizontal)

Allocate Codes (this is an example only, use these or make up your own codes):

P Performs action **C** Is consulted for opinion **D** Makes decision **I** Provides information

A Is advised of action/outcome **X** Not involved in any way

Team members may have multiple codes allocated. But the P should go to the one person who is responsible for this function/output.

Sample Responsibility and Accountability Matrix

List the key functions of your team

Team Members Key Functions	John	Mary	Fatima	Isaac	Guido	Han	Etc.
Planning	D/A	P	C	C	I	C	
Sales							
Budgets							
Etc.							

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Leadership and team performance

How would you describe the performance of the team or workgroup you lead and manage? Are they a collection of individuals who work independently of others? Or are they a team which communicates and collaborates to the extent required? Or are they a high-performance team?

What is a high-performance team? If you don't know then you have probably never worked in one. (The Mafia has high-performance teams led by a Caporegime or Capodecina - a lieutenant who typically heads a 'crew' of around 10 'soldiers'. They get mostly 100% compliance with their team practices as members inclined to stray are killed or their family members are killed).

But with your team or workgroup, you probably don't need to kill anybody.

A high-performance team is a team that people love to be part of. This team achieves its mission and objectives and does it in such a way that people enjoy coming to work every day. Now don't panic if you think that you don't have a high-performance team. Sometimes the nature of the work is not very stimulating or satisfying. But this is just the situation which requires even greater team leadership on your part.

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 how you **lead and manage your team**.

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 how well you are leading your team. 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?

- What we can and cannot do in relation to team performance is defined, explained, understood and applied.
- We express and explore all perceptions about team performance issues in a balanced, objective and factual manner.
- The background and the reasons behind team decisions that affect the ways we do our work are explained and accepted.
- We show commitment to team decisions and we follow through on those decisions.
- There are no repercussions (overt or covert) if we speak honestly and openly about unacceptable team practices or behaviours.
- We facilitate conformance with the best team practices where there are conflicting opinions.
- Team decisions that need to be made are made even though they may not please all team members.
- Decisions that have an adverse effect on team performance are reversed or modified.
- Both the positive and negative consequences of planned changes are discussed openly.
- Background issues that may be a root cause of unacceptable behaviour at work are identified and resolved.
- In relation to new initiatives or changes, we clarify what the team will do and why.
- Clear direction is provided to the team and individuals when the situation requires it.
- Support is provided to the team and individuals when the situation requires it.
- We improve team practices in the light of changing circumstances and changing customer expectations.
- We identify and eliminate or modify blockages to better team performance.
- Team performance is not compromised by workload and production demands.
- Attitudes and behaviour detrimental to team performance are identified and resolved.
- When required, people receive adequate counselling, training, coaching or mentoring related to team behaviour.
- We identify and acknowledge examples of outstanding team performance.
- We constantly measure the achievement of desired team performance.
- We actively listen when discussing issues that affect team performance.
- We demonstrate the team behaviours we expect of others.

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- We share responsibility for team leadership and team development so we are continuously improving our team results.
- As a team we provide appropriate feedback to our leader on their performance as team leader. We include specific suggestions for changes, if required.

‘The superior leader gets things done with very little motion. He imparts instruction not through many words but through a few deeds. He keeps informed about everything but hardly interferes at all. He is a catalyst, and though things would not get done as well if he weren’t there, when they succeed he takes no credit. And because he takes no credit, credit never leaves him.’

Lao-Tzu, 604-531B.C., Chinese philosopher and founder of Taoism, Tao Te Ching

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Learning and development

Awareness precedes all learning

Many years ago I heard the coach of the Dutch Olympic hockey team responding to the Dutch press who were baying for blood after the Dutch team lost the final for the Olympic gold medal. A medal they were the favourites to win with the hopes of a nation riding on their shoulders.

The Dutch coach was unruffled by the stinging attacks of his country's press. He said words to this effect, "Awareness precedes all learning. Now we are aware of what we have to learn to win a gold medal." The Dutch won gold at the next Olympics.

Much training or learning and development is unplanned and managed poorly. One important step is to create a mindset on the part of the person to be trained which is open to learning and accepting that there are things that they need to learn. This means that you have to convince people of where their skills, knowledge or attitude are deficient. If they don't have that awareness, you might be wasting your time.

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 **learning and development**.

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 how well learning and development is applied in your team.

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 improving training are explored and accepted.
- We contribute to identifying our individual, specific, high priority, learning needs.
- A training plan and strategy is prepared and followed through.
- We are informed of and participate effectively in learning opportunities.
- A budget is provided for future learning needs
- We assist in learning and development for each other by providing on-the-job training, coaching and mentoring when required.
- Learning priorities which link into the strategic plan for our area are established.
- People who take the initiative to develop their skills are acknowledged and given recognition.

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- The multi-skilling needs of staff are identified and incorporated in the learning plan and strategy.
- Quality “off-the-job” learning opportunities are provided to meet identified needs.
- People undergoing learning in a specific area know what will be expected in terms of application to their role.
- We follow through to ensure that new skills from learning initiatives are applied in the workplace and transferred to others, if relevant.
- We seek opinions from others in relation to the skills that they think we need to develop.
- Training in how to be a coach or mentor is provided to those who may be required to perform this role.
- People who have a particular expertise become an authority and adviser/mentor to relevant others.
- We have the competence and confidence to achieve our team objectives and targets.
- We ensure that people performing tasks are competent considering their education, training and/or experience.
- Learning is provided and evaluated when employees take on new jobs.
- Learning is provided and evaluated for positions requiring specialist competencies.
- Training records are effective and used.
- Management do what needs doing to support the implementation of the learning plan.

‘People learn from their failures. Seldom do they learn from their success.’

Harold Green, Chief Executive Officer, IT&T, Managing (Doubleday 1984)

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Managing change

People resist change for a variety of reasons. Three big ones are fear of the unknown; a desire to stay in their comfort zone; and not being involved in planning the change itself.

The more your people are informed about pending changes, the less resistance you will meet. When people aren't informed, they speculate and this can lead to half-truths, distortions, uninformed perceptions and rumour-mongering. But you need to go beyond informing.

If the change involves people losing their jobs, you can't do much more than tell the unpleasant truth. If the change does not involve people losing their jobs, then give them better context (the background, the rationale, the 'why' behind the change), better information and knowledge about the change, show them better perspectives and show them better interpretations.

Where the decision for the change is made by others and is outside your control, you can still involve your people in developing your strategy for dealing with the change.

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 **managing change**.

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 how well change is managed within your team.

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

- All people to be affected by the change are identified.
- The background and reasons for the change are explained.
- The positives and negatives of the change being made are identified and explored.
- We compare how the benefits of the change will outweigh the cost of the change.
- People who provide the service/product are involved in the planning phase and not just the implementation phase.
- The roles of all team members in relation to the changes are agreed.
- The consequences for all of us if we do not make the changes are explored.
- We gain agreement as to why the changes are necessary.
- The likely impediments to implementing the changes are identified and resolved.
- The priorities of key tasks are re-negotiated to accommodate the required changes.

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- Practical steps or required behaviours to implement the change are agreed.
- Other areas are informed of the changes and the reasons behind them, where appropriate.
- We demonstrate support for the intended change.
- We ensure adequate resources and budget are available to support the changes.
- We provide responses to questions/issues of concern about the proposed changes.
- We re-negotiate the priorities of other tasks to accommodate the change.
- A strategy and time-table including key behaviours / actions for the implementation of the change using input from those affected is developed.
- The priority of key behaviours/actions is determined before implementation.
- Training and coaching in the competencies required to implement the change are applied and evaluated for application in the workplace.
- We follow through on implementation of the changes.
- The impact of the change is reviewed on a regular basis.
- Management do what needs doing to help us implement the required changes.

‘Most organisations, left to their own devices, are going to atrophy, to get so institutional, so bureaucratic, that they get to the point where their original reason for existence has been lost, and they stagnate. So you have to have change, and by that I mean dramatic change.’

William G McGowan, Chairman, MCI Communications Corp, Inc. Magazine, August 1986.