

## High functioning teams - building sustainable team performance

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is the impact that our mental health has on all parts of our life and the extent to which it affects how we feel, what we think and what we do. It is inextricably linked with how we perform, the choices we make and the results we get. We have all had experiences personally and with family, friends and colleagues, through the tough times and challenges, about the importance of mental health to human wellness and to bringing the best version of ourselves to life.

There has also been heightened awareness individually, but also collectively, that the work we do is important, but it is not everything. Many people have used the time to re-evaluate priorities and reflect on what matters most in the lives they live. It has been a time, especially with working remotely and working from home, where separating life and work has been virtually (no pun intended) impossible. It has brought into sharp focus the importance of an integrated holistic life, where all parts work together to unlock personal meaning in the lives we lead, and a realisation that no longer can livelihoods and life be thought of as separate issues that needed to be balanced somehow. They needed rather to be complementary, each contributing in a reciprocal and mutually reinforcing way to the totality of our lives.

In a work context, and with hindsight, there is no doubt that the overwhelming focus within management theory and practice on building performance cultures did result in dramatic increases in productivity and financial indicators of success, but this did not necessarily translate to increases in human happiness or fulfillment. The obsession with performance produced results, but at a cost in human stress, anxiety and burn out. This approach, with or without the pandemic, was clearly not sustainable and the virus simply brought it to a head. The realisation is that whilst people are the resource that drives performance, if they are not sustainable then neither is the performance.

It is self-evident in sports psychology and human development practice that catering to the psycho-social-emotional needs of humans is one of the chief ingredients in sustaining superior team performance. A team is meant to do that which we can't do alone and is a vehicle for unleashing the creative potential and imagination needed to deal with the pressing problems we all face. The building blocks of high functioning in teams are making them highly personal to each person's situation and at the same time unleashing the power of intrinsic personal motivation to create a highly fulfilling experience.

This means that team leaders need to be skilled in two new capabilities and associated conversations:

1. We need conversations about crafting work experiences that support each individual to be at their best, in order to do their best. Leaders need to be empathic in exploring ways to carefully personalise work-life for each individual according to their needs and life circumstances. Just as everyone's life is unique, what we need to do or best, in the context of the life we live, will also be deeply personal.
2. Leaders also need to make the shift from extrinsic motivation to intrinsic. Extrinsic motivation and "carrots and sticks" techniques have been the hallmark of performance cultures in the past and have proved to be effective at guiding and directing behaviour. However, they don't work so well developing potential or igniting the human spirit, which rely more on awakening something within the person, which inspires them and gives them a greater sense of purpose and fulfillment.

The living case-study that we have been experiencing globally during the pandemic has shown us that if we truly want high performance that is sustainable over the long term and taking into account the volatile strategic context within which we operate now, then building teams that are high functioning might well be the new obsession that we need to adopt. Let's start with the people first. Let's create the culture, then craft the strategy, and let's ensure that our teams grow, learn and develop as is required in this time of emergent strategy, market volatility and ubiquitous technological advances.

High functioning teams, whether in homes or workplaces, are the ultimate key, not only to greater human connection and collaboration, but also to building the high performance we will need to address the challenges faced personally in our lives, collectively in our communities and globally on this fragile planet.