

2023 New Edition

# Building High Performance Teams

A Rathbone Results

eBook



RATHBONE  
RESULTS

UNLOCKING BUSINESS POTENTIAL

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<sup>1</sup> Our Rathbone Results proprietary 2-minute survey to assess strength of teamwork in teams and organisations:  
<https://www.rathbonerresults.com/survey-teamwork>



# The Author

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Cora Lynn brings an extensive thirty-year track record of unlocking potential within SMEs and leading global organisations (i.e. L'Oréal, Oracle, EdF), of delivering results by facilitating strategic plans, delivering bespoke leadership development programmes and coaching leaders and leadership teams to flourish and deliver exceptional performance.



Backing her experience in practice are a BA in languages and an MBA. She is also a Fellow CGMA and a Tavistock-trained ICF professional certified coach (PCC).



# 1

# Why talk about Teamwork?

Our aim at Rathbone Results is to unlock business potential. What does teamwork have to do with this?

A lot! A “company”, an organisation, is made up of people working as individuals in groups and teams. Individual performance and teamwork are at the heart of unlocking business performance. [And before you say, “there is no “I” in “team”, there are two “i”s in organisation!]

For us and for our clients at Rathbone Results, high performance teams and teamwork are dominant themes. Some businesses have nailed this; they value team-working and see no challenge to its continuation. Others struggle to make it happen.

This eBook explores what high performance teamwork looks like – as well as its challenges – and what companies, businesses and organisations can do to hardwire high performance teamwork into the way they work. Top tips for improving teamwork appear in red where relevant and are summarised at the end.



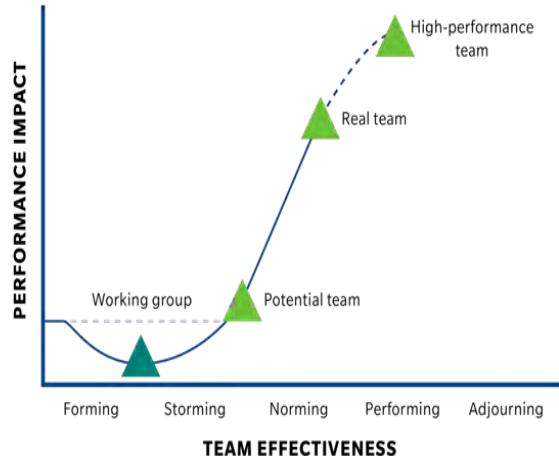
# 2 What makes it Hard for Colleagues to work in Teams – especially those who are High Achievers, classified as Talent or people in Key Roles?

[To start with the challenge...?]

Well, it could just be a function of time and the changes you make to the team.

Combining the Kubler-Ross curve with stages of team formation (Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith, *The Wisdom of Teams*, 2003) ...

We know it takes time for team members to settle into a new team before they and the team can deliver their best performance. We also know that when a new team first emerges, performance is likely to dip in the first instance before it recovers and then begins to rise.



Teams first form, then storm, then normalise, then perform. If teams are project teams, there is a fifth stage of adjourning. Every time a new team member arrives, or a team member departs, the team restarts, re-forms, and repeats all phases thereafter. The change curve and implied disruption on performance repeats each time the team reforms.

Where are you on this timeline and team development curve? Are you still forming, or storming, or norming, or performing, or about to adjourn? Are you making too many changes to the team, not allowing the members to settle, to normalise working together in order to progress to high performance?

And then ... some team members never progress beyond the individual contributor phase or the desire to simply be a working group. To be a real team, all team members must recognise and work towards one shared goal. That's not easy – especially if team members are also team leaders in their own right. Where does first loyalty lie when the goal of their own team requires resources that are also required to achieve the goal of the team in which he/she is a team member? To be a high performing team goes even further – with potential risks and sacrifices required, if only in terms of time, to help other team-members grow.



## Four Mind-sets



Given the above, we do well to ensure that (1) the team shares a goal, one that they can only deliver by working together with the complementary skills that they possess<sup>2</sup>, (2) team members are committed to each other and to growing each other's capabilities to outperform shared goals. AND 3) we recognise and celebrate complementarity and diversity of skill sets. We also do well to limit the number of changes we make to the team as with each change comes a repeat of the change curve and stages of team development.

In light of the above, three challenges repeat that work against high performance teamwork – with the first of these challenges being positive in its raw sense. We can however mitigate against these challenges through proven practices we've seen work in client organisations (in red):

1. A focus on individual results of the individual contributors often trumps team results. This speaks into David Rock's<sup>3</sup> "status" (something we are motivated to protect against losing). Such individual focus is fuelled by the following:
  - a. Individual targets, priorities and accountability within clear roles and responsibilities. These often drive individualism yet are necessary for efficient organisations. Let's be real and recognise that individual metrics naturally encourage individualistic behaviours. After all, the need to survive and succeed are fundamentally human. To mitigate this issue: we do well to **ensure there is balance between individual and team targets and clear interdependency between the individual targets of team members**.
  - b. Competitive drive for recognition and to achieve results, for self and for the team. A sense of "my head's on the block" drives "me"/"I" language even when the desired mind-set is "us"/"we". Individualism can be a symptom of high accountability and commitment to deliver – personally and collectively. To mitigate this issue: we do well to **emphasize the extent to which success truly requires collaboration and knowledge-sharing**.
  - c. Ambition – for recognition and self-development and promotion, to be seen at least as 'first amongst equals' when contributing their best for the team. A desire to outperform, to push 'self' to the limit, sometimes gets in the way of stepping aside to let someone else shine. To mitigate this issue: we do well to **create a culture that celebrates team results first, and individual achievements within that**.

<sup>2</sup> To the extent that team members participate in the setting of the team goal, you create transparency and with that raise trust at the same time as you broaden ownership and commitment to that team goal

<sup>3</sup> David Rock, an anthropologist and neuroscientist, introduced his SCARF model of motivation in 2006. The model proposes that as individuals we are motivated to protect against losing five things, with SCARF as an acronym of the five: Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relationships, Fairness. Our ranking of these five factors differs depending on our personality and circumstances. Elaborated in section "3" of this eBook.



2. A lack of trust – which speaks into David Rock’s “relationships” between members of the team (another factor we are motivated to protect against losing)

- a. Similarity and homogeneity - Research repeatedly shows that the highest performing teams are not those with the most able or intelligent members, but those with a high diversity of thinking – to ensure ideas are challenged, groupthink is disrupted, creativity is fuelled, innovation is fostered. To mitigate this issue: we do well to **celebrate the difference**, ‘mine for conflict’ and encourage constructive challenge (as well as support).
- b. Lack of trust – that others aren’t “watching my back”. The internal dialogue is: “If I pitch-in with others, who will recognise my personal contribution – if only so no-one accuses me of not pulling my weight?” To mitigate this issue: we do well to **recognise individual-team-member contributions, even as you focus first on the team result**.
- c. Lack of trust – in others’ motives. Nothing undermines trust like “self-interest”. Of course, self-interest is a human survival mechanism. However, if colleagues are seen to be more self-interested than interested in others – in what’s good for the business and for the team – collaboration won’t flourish. To mitigate this issue: we do well to **discuss how it’s in our ‘self-interest’ to also look out for the interest of the business/others**.

Lack of trust – in colleagues’ ability. The internal dialogue is: “They aren’t up to the task, and I don’t want to be tarnished with the same brush”. For colleagues to collaborate, team members must trust that other team members have the knowledge, experience and attitude to make the right contributions – or, as one of my French headquartered clients says, the “savoir”, “savoir fair”, “savoir être” for success. To mitigate this issue: we do well to **address skill gaps and better match people to the requirements of team roles**.

**“the highest performing teams are not those with the most able or intelligent members, but those with a high diversity of thinking”**





3. A fear of failure – which speaks into David Rock’s “certainty” (yet another factor we are motivated to protect against loosing)
- a. Fear of failure – if the required team performance is seen as unattainable. The internal dialogue, especially if the team is underperforming, is “Whatever is happening regarding team results, I have to be seen to be hitting the ball out of the park.” To mitigate this issue: we do well to **make a point of learning from ‘failures’**. Scientists see ‘failure’ as part of the discovery process. So too do businesses committed to innovation and continuous improvement. Seeing failure as an opportunity for growth is integral to a growth mindset.
  - b. Excessive corrective feedback. The neurosciences tell us that continuous negative feedback fixates the underperformer on precisely the poor performance and behaviour we wish to eliminate. Instead of building new mental and behavioural patterns, the repeatedly corrected individual is likely to stay on the same track, repeat negative behaviour spirals, become a broken spirit. To mitigate this issue: we do well to **be mindful of the balance between negative and positive feedback and, if overweighed towards negative, limit corrective feedback to mission-critical issues.**
  - c. Insufficient positive feedback. The same neuroscience research shows that a focus on what is delivering good results reinforces those activities and behaviours and builds new positive patterns of behaviour. To mitigate this issue: we do well to **‘task’ people to give at least x (say 3) positive pieces of feedback a day** – and build positive spirals of interaction.

# 3 What is the Case and Context for Teamwork?

[Drawing from client engagements, particularly those of the last seven years:]

## Context 1: The Importance of Collaboration and Belonging

Without people, even the most AI driven automated business and task is challenged to progress beyond the currently programmed algorithms. To thrive, businesses need energised and engaged people who pull together to achieve a greater whole.

We see this in the smallest SMEs and the largest global enterprises. Businesses whose people pull together to achieve greater results become great places to work. They are places where stretch targets are balanced by discipline, where support is balanced by trust. These places attract great and loyal talent who reinvent themselves (and the business) naturally and in a sustainable manner. Some businesses do this reinvention almost biologically, mutating through innovation, others in a more systemically structured and organised manner, others as a mixture of these two through innovation hubs operating on the boundaries of the business. However it is “organised”, interconnected people working as a team which remain at the heart of sustainable revenue-and-profits business growth.

So how do businesses attract and build a pool of people who pull together because they want to, not only because they need to? How do businesses build not just working groups but great teams? Let me ask a different question before we delve into the heart of this eBook - teamwork and how we build high performance teams: What are our greatest needs as human beings – that companies do well to provide, for their own highest performance and sustainable growth as well as for the wellbeing of their people?



# “People in teams find a sense of joy and are energized by working together within teams.”

In 1943, Abraham Maslow introduced his hierarchy of needs, saying – in this order – that we as humans need 1) physiological provisions (food, shelter, physical human companionship), 2) security (protect against losing what we have), 3) **belonging** (to be part of a tribe), 4) achievement, 5) self-actualisation.

In the “noughties”, 2008, David Rock said that we are motivated to protect against losing – not necessarily in this order – 1) status, 2) certainty, 3) autonomy, 4) **relationships**, 5) fairness.

In 2011 Harari published his ground-breaking book “Sapiens”, stating, at the start of his journey through the 7000 year history of homo sapiens, that what differentiated us (homo sapiens) from Homo Erectus and Neanderthal Man, what enabled us to outlive them, was **our ability to collaborate**.

Far from being a “nice to have”, **being part of something bigger than just ourselves is a human need**. Businesses that provide a culture of belonging and teamwork are more likely to recruit top talent and, all things being equal, outperform competitors<sup>4</sup>. For individuals more inclined to operate as expert individual contributors, it’s important to recognise that working as a team enables us as individuals to outperform even the best collection of individual contributors.

Indeed, the question “We enjoy and are energised by working together” attracts the second highest score in our TeamsWork Survey (see Appendix). There is something very human in this - that people in teams find a sense of joy and are energized by **working together** within teams.

How much emphasis do you place on building a context of enjoyment for your teams, on leveraging the team to energize team members, even as you drive hard for exceptional results? It’s not a question of sacrificing hard work for enjoyment but of also finding enjoyment in that hard work.

## Context 2: High Performance in Disruptive Times

How able is your business to respond effectively to today’s level of disruption and to initiate value-adding disruption whilst remaining focused on the goals you want to achieve? This is particularly poignant as the structures of nations are challenged, the economic landscape turns red, long-standing international treaties and protocols are being dismissed or questioned, and supply chains are under pressure.

<sup>4</sup> Reference Jim Collins’ book “Good to Great” (2001), Google’s research into high performance teams (2015), FIRO-B - Fundamental Interpersonal Relationship Orientation in terms of Behaviours (late 1950s)



For many clients, disruptive times mean that

1. decision-making is fraught – rushed for some, elongated for others as more stakeholders need to be consulted,
2. there are lots of interdependent spinning plates, all at the same time, with situations changing unexpectedly, amplifying uncertainty and ambiguity
3. change is increasingly complex, affecting multiple parties concurrently,
4. people are increasingly tired, over-stretched, close to burn-out.

Bottom line: tactics that worked before don't deliver the desired results. As Marshall Goldsmith said, "**What got you/us here won't get you/us there.**"

So, three questions – with brief answers that have served to unlock potential and teamwork in client organisations:

- 1. What do organisations need to do to deliver high performance in disruptive times?** More than ever, agile collaboration – collective agility. As an old African proverb says: "**If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.**" Some clients say "But we need to go fast to secure the present. Without success today, we have no future." True, but not the whole truth. High performance individuals and teams agree norms so they know when to team-up and when to work individually. Like great orchestras, led by great conductors, members of high performance teams play to a score which tells them when to play diverse arrangements harmoniously and when to play as solo virtuosos. More on this when we look towards the end of this eBook at our survey results of over 140 team members and 14 intact teams.
- 2. How do organisations build agile collaboration in disruptive times?** Change management research and client examples emphasise the importance of communicating the vision again and again to enable team members to "tack" the winds of change **yet remain focused and purposeful.** A Confucian quote comes to mind: "**The man who chases two rabbits catches neither.**" Also important is clarity around defined strategies and detailed action plans. An ancient proverb comes to mind: "**How can two walk together unless they are agreed?**" Together, shared purpose and clear detailed strategy go some way towards creating trust and psychological safety for high performance individuals to confront and celebrate difference, to leverage diversity.
- 3. What do high-performance individuals need to subjugate their own interests in favour of those of the team – especially in disruptive times?** Experience of working with such individuals in client companies says that a foremost need is clarity around their role/job description and how their personal purpose aligns to the collective end-goal. We all need clarity around how our individual contributions, responsibilities and accountabilities mesh with those of fellow team members. Such clarity removes practical obstacles to success, builds resilience and enables people to focus on achieving more together than as individual virtuosos.

Not that this is easy. Like a piece of tweed cloth that changes shape when pulled on the bias, we know from different client engagements that dynamics intensify in disruptive times – dynamics between what is right for the organisation versus the team or the individual, and between individuals and teams. In fact, the willingness to have crucial, often difficult, conversations is the question that attracts the lowest score in our TeamsWork Survey. (See Appendix). Interestingly, in Lencioni's questionnaire, three related questions that often attract the lowest scores are: "Team members point out one another's unproductive behaviour" and "Team members communicate unpopular opinions to the group" and "Team members question one another about their current approaches and methods". Could it be that team members are unwilling to risk the enjoyment and energy they get from working together by engaging in difficult conversations?



Especially in disruptive times, high performing teams need to embrace with courage the value of crucial conversations – to remove conflict, to forge alignment between what is best for the organisation, best for the team, best for the individuals.

How good are you at looking beyond the disruption and towards the collective goal - at building collaboration, agility and resilience by (in part) engaging with difficult conversations to deliver higher performance for today and tomorrow? As one client put it: you've got to break eggs to make an omelette.



### **Context 3: Sustaining Engagement during Multiple COVID Lockdowns**

When in modern history did so many have the opportunity to demonstrate value as individual contributors, to demonstrate self-sufficiency? Yet the internet was strained all around the world by Zoom calls (Zoom doubled its market capital valuation in the early days of COVID-19) and Outlook TEAMS meetings. It was, quite simply, a manifestation of our need to connect with others to deliver the individual and collective performance required by businesses. We seemed to instantly understand Michael Jordan's assertion: "**Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships.**"

Some clear lessons from client engagements:

#### **1st: Interdependence (between teams) matters.**

Connecting with each other was important within intact teams, AND ALSO between teams. The number of back-to-back meetings, day in and day out, during COVID-19 taught us that single teams need (a) the expertise of specialist individuals in other teams and (b) other teams to deliver results. Interdependencies between teams in our complex world demand cross-team collaboration.



## **2nd lesson: Diversity and inclusion matter.**

However brilliant we are as individuals, we need others gifted in different ways to ourselves to deliver results. Examples: At the start of lockdown, I benefited greatly from the support of a Zoom moderator – thanks Kristian! I also benefited from a fellow Partner who is far more gifted at business development, especially online lead generation, than I will ever be – thanks Jim!

Wider research points to the positive correlation between diversity and performance. A 2018 McKinsey study of 1000 companies across 12 countries found that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on their executive teams were 21% more likely to have above-average profitability. Those with ethnic and cultural diversity delivered 33% higher performance.

## **3rd Lesson: Relationships matter.**

People perform best when they are in relationship with others. Consider the exponential use of real-time social apps like Houseparty and Slack during COVID lockdowns. Being alone sucks, even for introverts. Interaction with others, and being part of a real team at work, contributes to well-being - in life and at work – and well-being contributes to higher performance. “**Human beings are ... social,... our sociality is our secret weapon.**” Martin E.P. Seligman

Affirming the relevance of the above points, two questions come equal top in our TeamsWork Survey: “We play different roles for which we have the right capabilities” and “We acknowledge our self-interest yet put what’s best for the team first”. Both are essential for good teamwork to exist. Interdependence isn’t relevant where the same capabilities exist. Inclusion isn’t required where roles are homogeneous. Relationships are impossible within teams when self-interest isn’t managed in the interest of the team.



**Companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on their executive teams were 21% more likely to have above-average profitability. Those with ethnic and cultural diversity delivered 33% higher performance.**



# 4 Why then is Teamwork Often a Challenge?

## What are the Issues we need to Look out For? [Circling back to our starting point...]

Let's look at individual behaviours among team members that are indicative of issues that challenge the ability of a team to work well as a team. For, as one CEO client put it: "I find that ... lack of awareness from the team leader [around the issues that challenge good teamwork] tends to be as much a concern as the issue itself."

We build on this below but, in short, team leaders do well to look out for five groups of behaviours – five dysfunctions – that indicate issues challenging the team's ability to work as a team: fear of failure, lack of healthy tension, questionable commitment, unclear accountability, ambiguity around THE team goal.

**Drawing on research into teamwork and experience as a team coach in both global enterprises and SMEs:**

As intimated at the start of this eBook, for some, the competitive spirit manifests in an unwillingness to take time to bolster the performance of a peer. The second lowest scoring question in our TeamsWork Survey<sup>5</sup> is: "We acknowledge each other and give each other feedback". Internalized questions are likely to be: "Why risk our own performance by taking time out to give someone feedback? Why risk relationships by giving each other feedback? Why risk interpersonal connections and personal belonging by getting stuck into the dynamics of building the team?" The third and fourth lowest scoring questions in our TeamsWork Survey points to this: "We communicate directly, in a constructive and timely manner" and "We hold each other to account for the quality and delivery of our work"

In this spirit, consider Lencioni's five dysfunctions of a team<sup>6</sup>, which speaks directly into why teams — even the best ones — often struggle. Two critical truths are clear. First, genuine teamwork in most organizations remains as elusive as it has ever been. Second, organizations that struggle to establish good teamwork unknowingly fall prey to five natural but dangerous dysfunctions.

These dysfunctions form an interrelated model, making weakness in even one dysfunction dangerous for the success of a team.

### 1st Dysfunction: Absence of Trust

When team members don't trust each other, they are unwilling to be vulnerable with each other. Why admit doubt or lack of expertise if you don't trust others to not abuse that knowledge? When trust is lacking, team members won't admit mistakes or weaknesses, repeating underperformance, making trust even more elusive.

<sup>5</sup> See appendix for more detail

<sup>6</sup> Patrick Lencioni: "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable"



## **2nd Dysfunction: Fear of Conflict**

Failure to build trust leads to a fear of conflict – or at least a reluctance to confront situations because you can't trust how challenge will be received. Reference the unwillingness to engage in difficult conversations from our TeamsWork Survey and the Lencioni questionnaire. This weakens debate, often eliminates the challenge of other team members' ideas, behaviours, performance. Team discussions are at best guarded, lukewarm.

## **3rd Dysfunction: Lack of commitment**

A lack of healthy conflict leads to lack of commitment. Without a commitment to work things through, healthy tension and innovation that comes from that are unlikely; there is likely to be groupthink. When opinions aren't aired in the course of passionate and open debate, team members don't buy in, are unlikely to commit to decisions even if they simulate agreement during meetings.



## **4th Dysfunction: Avoidance of accountability**

Lack of commitment and buy-in leads to avoidance of accountability. Team members who don't commit to a clear and agreed plan of action will not take personal accountability for the part they are meant to deliver.

## **5th Dysfunction: Inattention to results**

Failure to be accountable, and to hold each other accountable, distances team members from collective results. Team members put their individual needs (ego, career development, recognition) and the needs of their own departments above the collective goals of the team

## How can Teams overcome these Dysfunctional Challenges?

Lencioni suggests and we've seen the following (in red) work in our client companies:

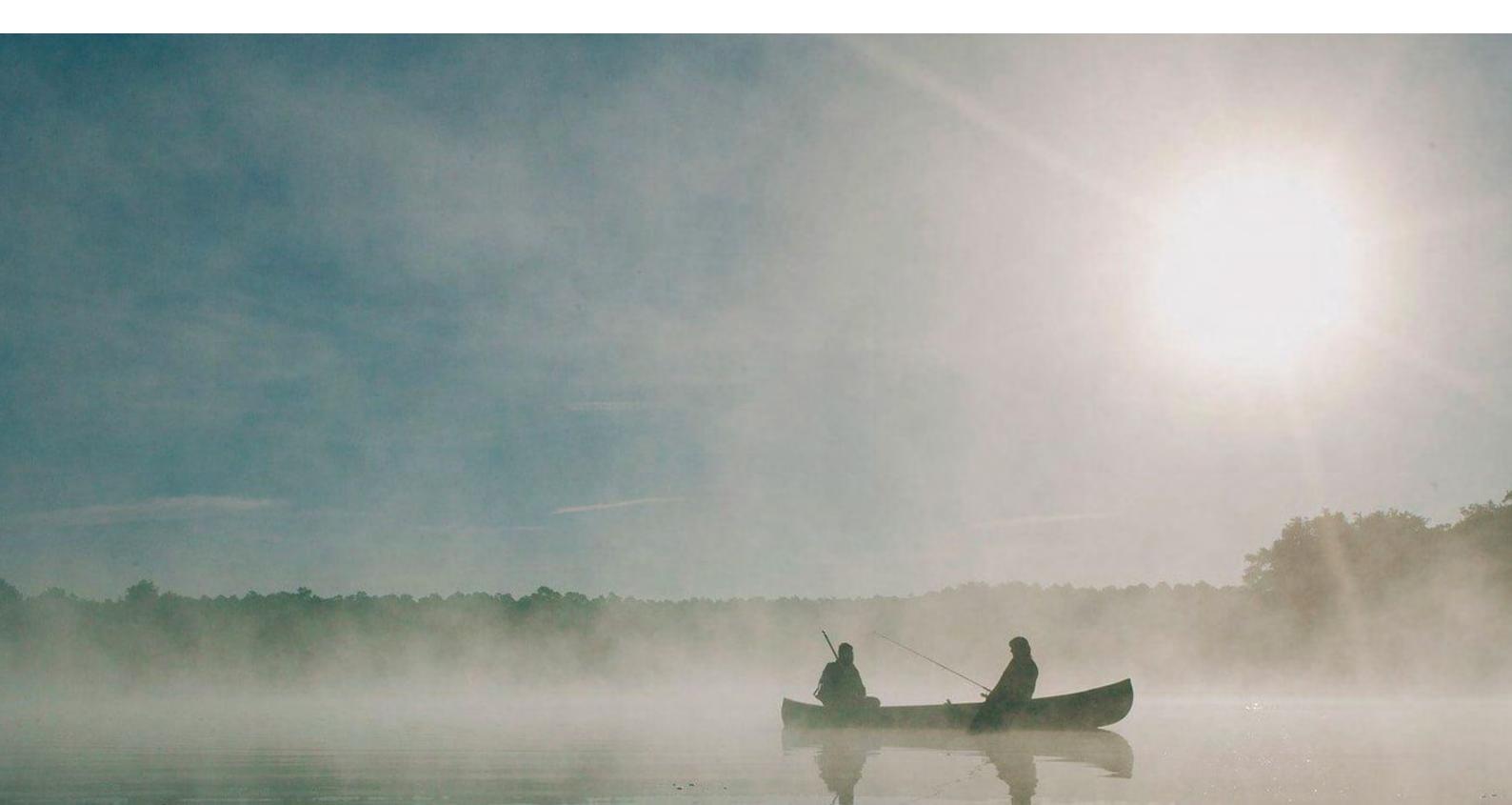
**To build trust:** have the team leader start the process of trusting others by showing vulnerability. By admitting own uncertainties, development needs and challenges, the team leader allows others to do likewise, developing a collective growth mindset and learning environment.

**To deal healthily with conflict:** invite team members to positively address conflict – even though our Teamwork Survey, Korn Ferry's FYI and results from Lencioni questionnaires applied to multiple global senior client teams shows that this is possibly the most difficult behaviour for most to adopt.

**To develop commitment:** force clarity and closure around what the team and the individuals in the team need to commit to doing, exploring in the process the obstacles that each team member sees to their ability to personally commit.

**To ensure accountability:** confront the difficult issues that stand in the way of each team member owning their part of the team goal, recognising publicly within the team as a whole that the team will not achieve its end-goal unless each team member takes ownership of their own part.

**To focus on results:** ensure as team leader that the team's end-goal is clear, that you set the tone and focus on team results. Ideally, set team results in consultation with the team; if not, ensure the reason for those targeted results is clear to the team. Ensure also that team members' rewards align to achievement of team results.



# 5 What is the Formula for Strong Teamwork?

## [... a client once asked]

Some years ago, as Executive Development Director at a globally leading business school, towards the end of a series of strategy sessions delivered to the Board of a £2 billion turnover client, the CEO approached me and said: "I haven't got it yet." "What's that?" I asked, feeling unnerved. "**I haven't got the formula.**" he replied. "What formula?" I asked. "**The formula for how you get people to put the interests of the organization above their own.**" He added. "I am a scientist. I know that if I join one molecule of oxygen and two of hydrogen, I get water. So, what is the formula **for getting people more excited about what we can do together than what they can achieve by themselves?**"

My answer, however inadequate, was: "People aren't molecules. Each person is a world. It takes a long time to get to know each. There is no formula."

Having said that, we can see several factors that, like links in a chain, combine to entice strong individual contributors to build and be part of high performance teamwork:

1. Establish clear purpose and shared meaning. There must be a big picture that defines why the team exists, that creates a sense of belonging, which ensures all know what they are collectively striving to achieve. Such collective results tend to be significantly greater than what any one team member can achieve on their own, a collective result that leads to greater collective achievement, autonomy, glory, gain than any team member could individually attain.
2. Agree clear ambitious goals, ideally (for greater ownership) that all team members help develop and sign up to deliver. These are a break-down of the team's purpose, a collection of team members' individual goals, interconnected such that no team member can achieve their own goal(s) unless they work collaboratively with other team members.
3. Define clear and diverse roles, where each team member knows what is expected of them and their colleagues, where the overlap between roles is enough to ensure interdependency, connection and trust YET not so great as to result in duplication, where the different skill sets between individuals makes each team member a source of potential mutual growth between colleagues.
4. Ensure clear communication that is sufficiently frequent and regular, to support individuals as they work through the increasing ambiguity of today's working environment. Even if the communication is 'I don't know any more than you do', such openness reduces 'jungle drums', 'inner circles'. Such openness preserves trust.
5. Conduct regular progress reviews that are transparent and fair, in pursuit of continuous learning, in a way that BOOSTs team members by inviting diverse perspectives, Balancing Objectivity with what is Observed, Specific in terms of details to drill-down within clear accountabilities, Timely to address performance issues and drive follow-up action.



# 6 What do we Know about the Highest Performing Teams?

Five characteristics emerged from recent (2015) research at Google. Hundreds of teams were asked: "What makes Google teams effective?"

The dominant logic was that 'dream teams' had the best players. "Not so," said the results.

Far more important than "who" is in the team is "how" the team operates. The "how" differentiated the best teams from the rest. Researchers at Google discovered 5 ways of working that the most effective and highest performing teams had in common:

1. established norms (alias: "clear goals", "team charters", "clear roles", "agreed approaches")
2. shared 'conversational turn-taking' (alias: the art of inviting others into the conversation and of managing those more inclined to talk a lot)
3. 'psychological safety' (alias: trust, willingness to be vulnerable, courage to have tough conversations)
4. 'social sensitivity', or an understanding of how to read others (alias: self and other awareness)
5. habits of tapping into the power of the collective to create solutions to more complex problems. (alias: brainstorming, collaboration, knowledge sharing, supporting and challenging exchanges)

The first three above appeared to have the greatest impact on team performance.

**Far more important than  
"who" is in the team is "how"  
the team operates.**



# 7

# How can we Manage Remote Teams?

## What have we Learnt from Pandemic Lockdowns? 4 Lessons for starters ...

**First lesson: Connect Often and Regularly – virtually if in-person is not possible or practical, by TEAMS or Zoom or Facetime or Webex (etc.)**

Judging by internet traffic and the doubling of Zoom's market cap, COVID-19 has taught us that talented individuals, even the greatest lone geniuses, on their own are not "sufficient" to deliver collective results.

When in modern history have so many lone geniuses had the opportunity to demonstrate self-sufficiency? Yet Zoom and Teams meetings have strained internet connections all around the world. We have all needed to connect with others to deliver the performance required of us, individually and collectively. As Michael Jordan of basketball fame said: "Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships."

**Second lesson: Remind all that Interdependence Matters (between team members and between teams)**

Judging by the number of meetings scheduled (sadly) back to back, COVID-19 has taught us that single teams need the expertise of others and other teams to deliver collective results. Increasingly, team boundaries are porous. Interdependencies between teams in our complex world demand inter-team collaboration. As Jacques Cousteau (oceanographer, filmmaker and author) pointed out: "We forget that the water cycle and the life cycle are one." In other words, even if we are not members of specific teams, we are all interconnected into teams and between teams. Success, at an individual and team level, is tied into success of the whole business/company within which we work.

**Third lesson: Celebrate Diversity and Inclusion Often when you Meet as a Team.**

However brilliant individuals are, we need other individuals gifted in other ways to ourselves to deliver great results. Examples: At the start of lockdown, I benefited greatly from the support of a Zoom moderator. Thanks Kristian! I also benefited from a fellow Partner who is more gifted at business development, especially online lead generation, than I will ever be. Thanks Jim!

More widely, research points undeniably to the positive correlation between diversity and performance. A 2018 study of 1000 companies across 12 countries found that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on their executive teams were 21 percent more likely to have above-average profitability and those with ethnic and cultural diversity delivered 33 percent higher performance. (McKinsey and Co). As Jesse Jackson (political activist, Baptist minister, and politician) said: "Inclusion is not a matter of political correctness. It is the key to growth."

**Fourth Lesson: Make time to Build and Deepen Relationships.**

People perform best when they are in relationship with others. Judging by the exponential use during lockdown of real-time social apps like Houseparty, being alone drains energy, even for introverts. Interaction with others, and being part of a real team at work, contributes to well-being - in life and at work – and well-being contributes to higher performance. To quote Martin E.P. Seligman (American psychologist, educator, and author of self-help books): "Human beings are ... social, and it is our sociality that is our secret weapon."



# 8

# What are our Conclusions and Top Tips?

If it is so hard to work in teams, and it is becoming harder as individualism grows, why not call it a day on team-working?

Because, quite simply, **real teams and high performing teams multiply the effort of its individual members and make for resilient, sustainable and high-performing organisations.**

As people and at work, to differing degrees, we need to work in teams to have a real sense of belonging and connection. Given current and increasing disruptive turbulence, organisations need teams of diverse people to deliver creative and innovative products and services that sustainably satisfy markets and customers. Working in teams and between teams is essential to deliver collective results in complex environments.

Teamwork requires attention to overcome known dysfunctions and challenges. And we have clear keys for addressing those challenges. True high performance teamwork is within the grasp of all organisations – teams where team members not only work towards delivering a collective result but commit to going beyond that by investing in the development of each other.

For the sake of individual wellbeing and collective results – teamwork is worth fighting for!



## **Top Tips for Developing a High Performance Teams – for Team Leaders and Team Members**

Take a moment to review the following tips - most made at different junctions of this eBook, a few added by way of wrap-up and for good measure. As you do so, ask yourself two sets of questions:

- A. Which of these tips do I/we already do? Which could I/we do more or better? Which do we need to start doing?
- B. Which of these practices are easiest to do and would deliver the maximum impact? How will I get it started?

### Tips around the team goal

1. Ensure that the team has a shared a goal, one that is clear and compelling and that can only be delivered by team members working together with the complementary skills that they possess
2. Develop focus on team results
3. Force clarity and closure around what the team and the individual team members need to commit to do
4. Create balance between the targets of team members and the team goal, clarifying interdependency between team members' targets

### Tips around developing collaboration between team members to achieve the team goal

1. Emphasize that success requires collaboration and knowledge-sharing – and precisely where collaboration and knowledge-sharing needs to occur
2. Confront the difficult issues that stand in the way of each team member owning their part of the team goal
3. Develop the team members' commitment to each other and to growing each other's capabilities to outperform shared goals
4. Recognise and celebrate complementary and diversity of skill sets amongst team members
5. Identify and address skill gaps in team members and ensure you are matching people (their knowledge, experience, skill and will) to the requirements of team roles

### Tips around building trust in decision-making

1. Where possible, to increase transparency and broaden ownership, invite team members to participate in the setting of the team goal
2. As team leader, be prepared to show your own vulnerability – as trust underpins everything from the setting of the team goal, individual team member targets and reward structure to the assignment of roles, establishment of working norms and performance management
3. Invite team members to positively embrace and address conflict, between each other and in making decisions – to foster healthy tension and avoid groupthink, to foster creativity and innovation
4. Explore openly how it serves 'self-interest' to look out not only for our individual interests but also for the interest of others and of the business
5. Agree the principles of decision-making for the team, which decisions will be made collaboratively/in consultation with team members and which not



## Tips around creating commitment to the team

1. Create an environment where team members feel they belong
2. Limit the number of changes to the team, as with each change comes a repeat of the change curve and stages of team development
3. Create a culture - and this includes everything from the giving of feedback to the benefits and reward structure - that celebrates team results first, then individual team member achievement within that
4. Recognise individual team member contributions, even as you focus first on the team result

## Tips around continuous learning

1. Make a point of learning from 'failures' – to see failure as an opportunity for growth at a team member, team and organisational level
2. Mindfully limit corrective feedback to mission-critical issues – and 'task' people to give at least, say 3, positive pieces of feedback a day
3. Make a habit of asking at the end of most if not all team meetings: what went well, what could have gone better, what could we have done/not done that would have helped our discussion?



# 9

# What is Rathbone Results' Teamwork Model?

## What does High Performance Teamwork Look Like?

### The Context

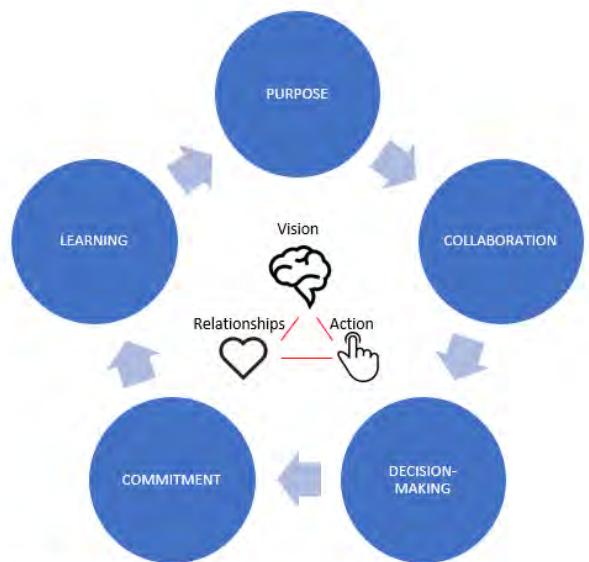
Business complexity has mushroomed at the same time as change has accelerated exponentially. High performance, once anchored in high performing individuals, increasingly depends on dynamic teamwork. Yet teamwork is hard, not least for high performers who can be excused for thinking they need to sacrifice personal recognition to allow the team to share the glory.

### Five Characteristics of High Performance Teamwork

So, what does high performance teamwork look like? - and what can you focus on to improve teamwork in your organisation?

Consider **five characteristics**<sup>7</sup> that we “see” when looking at a high performance team. Each characteristic has its own set of supporting competencies. High performing teams demonstrate

1. **TRANSFORMATIVE PURPOSE (TP)**, the product of wholesome results and goal orientation that natural instils **accountability**.
2. **ALIGNED COLLABORATION (AC)**, the product of **well-defined roles**, and people with the **right capabilities in those roles**, woven together by **recognition, participation and communication**.
3. **TRUSTED DECISION-MAKING (WD)**, that combines **facts** with **diverse perspectives** to unleash **creativity** and foster a sense of **fairness**.
4. **WHOLEHEARTED COMMITMENT (WC)**, the product of clear **norms, belonging and affinity/care** between team-members.
5. **CONTINUOUS LEARNING (CL)**, stimulated by a drive for **continuous improvement, reflection** and **conflict resolution**.



In some cultures, and situations, some of these five characteristics appear (a) less important than others and (b) easier or harder to live out. Yet, for international teams to perform well over the long term, team members need to demonstrate all five characteristics – to some extent and all at once.

<sup>7</sup> References include Carl Jung, William Schultz, Joyce and Robert Hogan, Geert Hofstede, Shalom Schwartz, Kenneth Blanchard, Patrick Lencioni, Meredith Belbin, Gallup 12/Strengthfinder, Ram Charam



It is also worth saying, as one senior client pointed out, that whatever the team leader does, whatever team members do, some individuals simply won't commit wholeheartedly to collaborate in an aligned manner with others in the team to deliver the team's transformative purpose. This is more often the case in individualistic cultures - where "ego", or the desire/need to be personally involved in the setting of the team goal, or the psychological need to be recognised drives behaviours that work against blending personal contribution into a shared result. No team or team leader can force an individual who is individualistically inclined to team-up for high performance of the team as a whole. Though the departure of an individualistic performer from the team causes dislocation for the individual and the team, and forces the team to re-form – with a Kübler Ross 'cost' to performance and time –, it is often sadly inevitable.



## **What are the (Three) Skillsets of High Performance Leaders & What is the Role of Individual Leadership in High Performance Teamwork?**

Usually, it is the role of the team leader to foster these five high performance team characteristics within the team. Where the team is self-regulated and where hierarchy is less relevant, responsibility for creating the environment in which these characteristics can manifest rests with team members.

Team leaders and team members - as individuals - are hard-wired to pay more attention to some of the five characteristics and may even neglect or struggle to address others; yet mindful practice can enable any team leader and/or team member and therefore any team to deliver on all five counts – as a whole team.

What then do you as a team leader/team member need to work on - to more consistently promote and develop these five characteristics in the teams you lead and are part of? In a nutshell, you need to strengthen one or more of three personal core leadership skillsets – shown at the centre of our teamwork model: your vision (how you think/create purpose), your actions (how you make things happen), your relationships (how you engage with others).



Though this takes us to our Rathbone Results model of leadership (that realm of personal leadership – for another if not several eBook(s)), let's touch on it briefly. Because we cannot talk about teams without talking about how individual team members/leaders come into those teams – as team leader or as team members.

At its simplest, team members are often individual leaders in their own right (if only leaders of their own performance as individual contributors). They/we show up at an individual level when they/we come into a team. As individual leaders, we prioritise either vision (PURPOSE, CONTINUOUS LEARNING, strategy, blue-sky innovation, the end-game, goals, results, objectives, logic, thinking, savour) or action (ALIGNED COLLABORATION, DECISION-MAKING, the doing, operations, activity, meetings, client delivery, KPIs, milestones, action plans, savour-fair) or relationships (WHOLEHEARTED COMMITMENT, engagement with staff, customer relationships, interaction with people, networking and networks, social creativity, organic innovation, savour-être). It's helpful to be self-aware of which of these three skillsets we most often lead with, as that will have an impact on which of the five high performance teamwork characteristics we are most likely to emphasise.

Undeniably, team leaders and team members together establish the environment in which teams develop and deliver these five characteristics. Greater self-awareness of yourself as a leader is sure to improve teamwork. By working as a leader on how you envision the business, take action and build engaging relationships, you transform the way you lead and contribute to and build high performance teams. As you improve teamwork, you extend that collaborative environment to the wider organisation, empowering people to be more productive, accountable, to flourish, to achieve more together than apart!



# 10 How can Rathbone Results Support You and Your Business to Develop High Performance Teams?

At Rathbone Results we start with the end in mind – the strategic plan that commences with clarification of the team vision and team goal, what you want to achieve, the **why** - the reason you exist as a team. This has to be firmly rooted in the vision and related targets of your organisation. To that we add implementation support - a key to hardwiring **accountability**. Because what got you here won't get you there, we layer on tailored management and leadership and team development - to **equip you** individually and collectively to rise to the challenge. To personalise application and **deepen commitment**, we offer coaching and/or mentoring. Our systemic approach ensures broad and deep buy-in, even as it builds team spirit and teamwork through the process.

We can support you with this end-to-end process, or we can simply start with your situation, informed by our RR teamwork survey which we would ask you and your team members to complete in advance. Our support to you can be as simple as a debrief of your teamwork survey results – and progress or not from there. Or it can embrace the full process from the start – facilitation and documentation of your team strategy, implementation support over a period of 6 to 12 months, team development and team/individual coaching. It's a question of where your team is on the Kubler-Ross and Katzenbach maturity curve. And the choice is always yours!



**Why not take our 2-minute TeamsWork Survey to get a measure of the strength of teamwork in your team or organisation?**

<https://www.rathbonerresults.com/survey-teamswork>

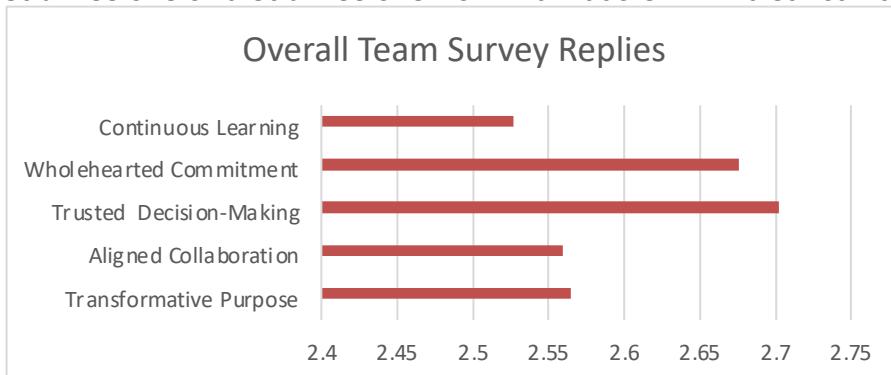
**Or get in touch, book a call with us, if you'd like to discuss how we can help you unlock potential in your teams, unlock potential in your organisation through high performance teamwork across and between your teams.**



# 11 Appendix

**TeamsWork<sup>8</sup> Survey Results:** Greatest strengths and greatest areas for improvement in teamwork

Results from over 140 survey completions over a period of 18 months representing individual submissions and submissions from individuals in 14 distinct intact teams show the following



Scoring:  
1 = Rarely  
2 = Sometimes  
3 = Often

The characteristic that attracts the highest scores is trusted decision-making followed closely by wholehearted commitment. The characteristic that could most be improved is continuous learning. Looking at the individual questions:

Greatest Strengths - highest scores indicate behaviours more likely to be engaged in “often” rather than “sometimes”

## 1. WC<sup>9</sup> – Q4 We play different roles for which we have the right capabilities 2.76

Good assignment of roles to skills sets and experience – a matching of technical capability to required tasks. Though roles are not exclusively task-related, as one of Belbin’s<sup>10</sup> team-roles is that of being a team builder, high score here is likely to reflect a matching of clear capabilities to clear roles. High score also suggest that team members play to their strengths, that work is distributed based on concrete and distinct skill sets, minimising duplication and domination by some of others.

## 2. WC – Q20 We acknowledge our self-interest yet put what’s best for the team first 2.76

Honesty and psychological safety in recognising own, personal self-interest and the humility to prioritise the team’s needs. This points to an attitude and mind-set that allows for self-reflection and self-disclosure that could extend to disclosure in the context of the team as a whole.

<sup>8</sup> Our unique 2-minute survey that you can complete to assess the strength of teamwork in teams and organisations: <https://www.rathbonerresults.com/survey-teamswork>

<sup>9</sup> WC = Wholehearted Commitment

<sup>10</sup> Meredith Belbin identified nine roles that team members play that contribute to how the team functions. These roles are additional to the “task” individuals fulfil and contribute as team members.



### 3. AC<sup>11</sup> – Q19 We enjoy and are energised by working together 2.75

Comradery is high suggesting a good level of inclusion in FIRO-B terms, a blending of people who satisfy each other's needs for interpersonal interaction.

**Greatest Development Areas - lowest scores indicate behaviours more likely to be done “sometimes”, rather than “often”**

#### 1. CL<sup>12</sup> – Q17 We encourage difficult conversations to resolve conflict and to continuously improve 2.38, lowest score overall

Lack of psychological safety makes team members reluctant to address inter-personal conflict, reluctant to engage in difficult inter-personal exchanges. A fear of being seen as critical could be at the root of this. A prioritising of relationships (Q19) may create a reluctance to risk those relationships, inhibiting the opportunity to perform at a higher level and develop stronger long-term relationships by engaging in difficult conversations to resolve conflict and continuously improve. Reinforcing this, from recent senior-team client assignments that have included extensive use of Lencioni's questionnaire, the two questions that received the lowest score, in this order, across 120 senior leaders were:

Lencioni Q8 Team members point out one another's unproductive behaviour

Lencioni Q23 Team members communicate unpopular opinions to the group

When we asked respondents, à propos of question 8: "Why might this be the case?" an answer that repeated was: "It is not our role as a team member to point out a peer's bad behaviour. That is for the team leader to do." Whilst respect for hierarchy is at play here, so too is a reluctance to reach out to peers with what could be seen as a "critique", reluctance to risk team relationships.

Whatever the underlying motives, underproductivity of others and conflict that arises from that is preferred to having the crucial conversations that could unlock more aligned collaboration, learning and higher performance.



<sup>11</sup> AC = Aligned Collaboration

<sup>12</sup> CL = Continuous Learning

**2. AC – Q9 We acknowledge each other and give each other feedback** 2.43, second lowest score overall

In this case, the nature of feedback, positive and constructive, takes us into a more interpersonal domain. Given that respondents gave high marks to “enjoy … working together” (Q19), there may be reluctance to shake the boat by calling out individuals within the team. Kicking in here may also be the popularised comment “there is no ‘I’ in team” (even though, as I like to point out, there are ‘I’s in organisation).

In another recent client assignment that included the Gallup 12 questions (posed at the start and end of a customised development programme as a method for measuring development and ROI in individual participants), the question that consistently scored lowest is “In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.”

Clearly, the giving of feedback – positive or constructive – challenges team members even as its absence is a challenge to the building of strong teams. This is particularly interesting when you consider the research on wellbeing which tells us that giving someone positive feedback boosts the wellbeing of the giver and the receiver. The Losada Score, rooted in the neurosciences and research around wellbeing, posits that to build strong healthy relationships we need to give others no less than 3 positive pieces of feedback for every constructive piece of feedback.

**3. AC – Q10 We communicate directly, in a constructive and timely manner** 2.45, third lowest score overall

At work we focus on two dimensions concurrently – the task and people (Blake and Mouton). Could it be that a honed focus on and mastery over getting tasks done gets in the way of communication as a tool for greater alignment and collaboration, a tool for steering personal as well as team performance for greater results? Communication takes time which perhaps in the speed of today’s work contexts is viewed as better invested in getting the work done.

**4. TP<sup>13</sup> – Q12 We hold each other to account for the quality and delivery of our work** 2.46, fourth lowest score overall

Team members don’t accept, or choose not to accept, personal responsibility for holding each other to account for delivering quality when it comes to individually assigned tasks. Could it be that they see themselves and others as individual contributors, assuming only the team leader (who can’t be everywhere at once) is the one to hold individual team-members to account for quality delivery, even though each team-member’s delivery contributes to the delivery of the whole team and therefore each team-member’s delivery impacts on the delivery quality of each other team-member? It could be that collective responsibility for holding peers to account may be being sacrificed to protect “relationships” and the “enjoy[ment of] … working together.” Many see this responsibility as lying in the hands of (and best left to) the team leader. Interestingly, in the same recent client assignment that significantly used Lencioni’s questionnaire, the third lowest scoring question was: Lencioni Q20 - Team members question one another about their current approaches and methods

<sup>13</sup> TP = Transformative Purpose



## **Stepping back and looking at the strengths of and development areas for teamwork:**

The biggest strength lies in (1) trusted decision making, supported by high scores for the question around roles - assigned to those with the capabilities to fulfil them, and (2) wholehearted commitment, rooted in the enjoyment and energy that comes from working together and leading to a willingness to admit yet submit own interests to those of the team. Respondents give high marks to the team's or team leader's ability to deploy and leverage the individual capabilities of team members. They also give high marks to the enjoyment and energising nature of working in teams.

The biggest challenges when working in teams revolve around the 1:1 inter-personal interactions between team members, and the reluctance to have crucial, difficult conversations that often prove catalytic to more productive working practices.

Korn Ferry, in their handbook “For Your Development”, points out that out of the 36 skill sets and behaviours that they identify as relevant across six levels of management and leadership, the one behaviour or skill set that is ranked amongst the most important AND consistently least evident in each of the six levels is **conflict resolution**. This skill set appears to be at the heart of the development areas which, if addressed, unlock teamwork and team potential.

**Difficult conversations and the giving of feedback** – positive and constructive - top the list of actions that managers and leaders could do better to promote continuous learning within teams, to attain higher productivity and higher performance.

This conclusion aligns to Google’s research results that the highest performing teams

1. Have psychological safety – to speak about what they see and how that impacts on them
2. Understand and work to team norms – which implies team norms have been/are discussed and agreed between team members
3. Exercise shared air-space – which implies communication is rich and abundant across team-members.



For support to unlock your  
business potential for Scaleup  
growth through higher performance  
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