

# Why Teams Matter



We spend a lot of time exploring what makes teams work and how to improve their effectiveness, but how often do we stop and think about *why* and *when* to deploy teams in the first place?

**“The essence of effective teamwork is to create a product through a collective effort that exceeds the quality of an individual endeavour.”<sup>[1]</sup>**

We know that teams are increasing in importance. In 2016, an article by Deloitte University Press stated:

**“The ability to quickly build, deploy, disband, and reform teams is a critical skill for today’s organizations.”**

So what advantages do teams have over individuals? And how do we capitalise on the advantages of teamwork, whilst avoiding the pitfalls?

## **1. Teams offer diversity.**

One person cannot do everything proficiently. In teams, individuals are able to share their strengths in complementary roles to produce meaningful results. With the interpersonal dynamics teamworking creates, collaboration offers more than the sum of its parts. Your team needs a Team Role make-up that reflects its purpose and goals, otherwise it may be the case that ‘you don’t know what you don’t know’.

## **2. Teams promote learning opportunities.**

Hand in hand with diversity, working in teams benefits individuals who are exposed to their colleagues' different approaches, experiences, perspectives and skills. In addition to our 'natural' or preferred Team Roles, we all have manageable Team Roles – behaviours we can adopt from time to time – and which can be cultivated to add another string to our bow. Watching others in action playing these roles is a great way to learn.

## **3. Teams can address more complex problems**

As complexity increases, tasks can fall beyond the scope of the individual. According to Ernst & Young in their 2013 study: "Almost 9 out of 10 companies surveyed for this report agree that the problems confronting them are now so complex that teams are essential to provide effective solutions."<sup>[2]</sup>

## **4. Teams offer flexibility**

Individual members can come and go, offering their skills, expertise and Team Role contributions at the stage when they are most needed, and then moving on as the project progresses. Individual activities can be effectively co-ordinated to help people work more effectively, save time and avoid frustration.

## **5. Teams deliver faster results.**

When teams are working optimally and workload is shared to best advantage, progress is faster than individual endeavour.

## **6. Teams can mirror organisational values.**

A strong team can be a microcosm of the organisation, espousing its values and working towards a shared purpose and a common goal. When a team is working in harmony with broader aims, the sense of belonging and commitment to the team can extend to the organisation too, giving employees an increased sense of loyalty to their company.

## **7. Teams don't just make us better workers, they make us better people.**

Teams are the human side of working. To be an effective team member, you have to listen to others, and show sensitivity to their feelings and needs. Google's Project Aristotle – their research into effective teams – found that empathy and taking turns in conversation led to psychological safety, the best predictor of success.

## So if teams are so important, why do things go wrong?

In 2016, Harvard Business Review published an article about “collaborative overload” – the over-reliance on teams and collaboration. According to their data, time spent by managers and employees in collaborative activities had increased by 50% or more over the past two decades, but frequently not to the benefit of individuals or their organisations.

### In demand, but disengaged.

HBR found that those who were in highest demand as collaborators in their companies had the lowest engagement and career satisfaction scores, despite clearly being identified by colleagues as knowledgeable and valuable contributors. This was because they were frustrated at spending time on *ad hoc* requests, and wanted to do more training, coaching and mentoring. Once they were collaborating in a more effective way, engagement levels picked up.

### People underperform because they're overwhelmed.

It's the responsibility of the manager to ensure that work is distributed effectively, not heaped upon the few who show willing. Allowing helpful people to become a bottleneck is a disservice to all involved, from the individual to the team – even the customer?

## So how do we leverage the benefits of teamwork?

Harvard Business Review has a number of recommendations.

### 1. Make conscious decisions when allocating work

Can the work be accomplished more effectively by an individual or well-matched pairing?

### 2. Protect the meaning of 'team'

Teams shouldn't be large amalgams of individuals with no common identity or purpose. When a team is needed, their size should be kept small to avoid disengagement, groupthink and lengthy unproductive meetings – we think four is an ideal number.

### 3. Compose teams 'on purpose'

Teams need to be deliberate in structure, intent and goals in order to be truly effective. The key is to distribute work effectively, and that means identifying what each person has to offer and ensuring they're playing to those strengths. But there's more...

**“Thanks to the various strengths they bring to the table, teams have the potential to outperform individuals yet often fail to capitalize on this potential.**

**Finding ways to let team members know about how their behavior positively affected others in the past can offset concerns about social acceptance that come with exposing one’s unique perspectives and identity to others. Making people aware of their own strengths results in better communication among team members and thus higher levels of performance.”<sup>[3]</sup>**

To create a truly positive team environment requires reflection – on what worked well and how behaviours were used to benefit the team. This positive feedback is carried forwards into the next team, making that individual a more effective and engaged collaborator.

## **Next steps**

We can help you develop and manage high-performing teams. We can help teams understand the importance of collaboration, communication and working towards a common shared goal.

We can work with you to identify individual strengths and offer advice on how to allocate work most effectively within your team.

Are you ready to optimise your team? Contact us and find out how!

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<sup>[1]</sup>"Communication in Cross-Functional Teams", Karl Smart and Carol Barnum, February 2000

<sup>[2]</sup> "The Power of Many: How companies use teams to drive superior corporate performance", Ernst & Young, May 2013

<sup>[3]</sup> "Preparing the Self for Team Entry: How Relational Affirmation Improves Team Performance", Julia J. Lee, Daniel M Cable, Francesca Gino, Bradley R. Staats, Harvard Business School, 2016

