A consolidation of thought pieces on the subject

Points of Interest

- *The first article suggests ten leadership techniques that can assist leaders in building high-performing teams.*
- *The next article introduces Nancy Kline's concept of a Thinking Environment and looks at some of the benefits of this approach.*
- *Following this, we look at goal setting and goal alignment. We explore the purpose, impacts and techniques.*
- *The final articles address some aspects of feedback—both providing constructive feedback as well as receiving feedback.*
- *Finally, we conclude with some questions for reflection.*

10 LEADERSHIP TECHNIQUES FOR BUILDING HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS (EXTRACT)

BY PHIL HARKINS

Well-integrated, high-performing teams - those that 'click' - never lose sight of their goals and are largely self-sustaining. In fact, they seem to take on a life of their own. And it's all down to leadership. In every case that has been studied at the Europe-based Centre for Organisational Research, teams that 'click' always have a leader who creates the environment and establishes the operating principles and values that are conducive to high performance. The evidence for this is clearly seen in organizations where a manager who creates high performance moves to another part of the organization, or a different organization, and within 18 months they once again establish a high performing team. We believe these leaders operate in an organized, systematic way to build successful teams, and that the formula not only involves what leaders should say and do, but also what they should not say and do. It also involves working backwards - leaders should envisage the future before dealing with the present.

TOP TEN LEADERSHIP TECHNIQUES FOR BUILDING HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS

1 Define a very clear picture of the future - a vision for the team. This is crucial, because teams search desperately for specific targets. Consider the old expression: "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." Journeys without a clear destination leave groups feeling flat and lost. Keeping teams informed on where they're headed and how best to get there means leaders must be prepared to acknowledge and adapt to changes in operational conditions and even objectives. Leaders cannot sit back and watch, but instead must create and recreate the vision and team spirit that stops people losing heart and becoming lost.

2 Be genuine, even if it means lowering your guard. Leaders who create 'click' have an uncanny sense about how and when to express their inner selves. They will even reveal their own vulnerabilities at the right time to gain the respect of those around them. They are not so concerned about projecting a perfect image: they know that high-impact leaders get results by laughing at their own flaws. They don't play make-believe, knowing it's more important 'to be' than to 'seem to be'.

3 Ask good questions. They use enquiry and advocacy in such a way as to

"A high performing team is more than a group of individuals but is a coming together of people with a sense of common purpose, and operate in an environment that enables quality thinking and is feedback fit."

"An effective team is a high performing team."

keep them abreast of what is really going on. They seem to use a simple formula of the 70-20-10 rule in conversations: 70 per cent listening, 20 per cent enquiring with just the right amount of advocacy, and 10 per cent tracking (i.e., summarizing and synthesizing information, and providing possible courses of action).

4 Talk about things - even the hard things. A leader who gets their team to click is not afraid to talk about the tough stuff. They find ways to have the difficult conversations in the knowledge that burying problems doesn't make them go away. They also know that if they, as leader, don't talk about things, no-one will and, pretty soon, a culture will develop in which too many things are left unsaid. (I can always tell when teams are dysfunctional by measuring the amount of stuff not talked about, or what I call the "let's not go there" issues.)

5 Follow through on commitments. Leaders of high-performing teams find ways to build trust and maintain it, especially by making teams hold to their commitments and keeping the team's view of its goals clear. However, they also know how to distinguish professional trust from blind loyalty.

6 Let others speak first. In high-performing teams, members see themselves as equal in terms of communication. Leaders should therefore encourage this by putting the other person's need to express their agenda ahead of their own.

7 Listen. High-performing teams comprise people who have mastered the art of listening without fear, of allowing others to speak without reacting strongly or negatively to what is being said, or what they anticipate will be said. The leader fosters and honours this attribute within the team by quickly putting a stop to bad conversational behaviour that cuts other people off and implies that their ideas are not valued. The leader knows that achieving higher levels of innovation requires team members to be unafraid to express unusual ideas and advocate experimental processes. They emphasize this by publicly thanking those who take risks - and by making sure that sharp-shooters put

their guns away.

8 Face up to non-performing players. This brings us to a very important characteristic of high-performing teams, which is that their leaders do not tolerate players who pull the team apart. Interestingly, experienced leaders frequently maintain unity and discipline through third parties in the form of people we call 'passionate champions'. A leader may surround his or herself with several passionate champions, who have established an understanding and close working relationship with one another, and who are totally focused on, and committed to, the team's objectives. They are capable of getting the job done - and not afraid to remove people who are failing to help them do so.

9 Have fun, but never at others' expense. High-impact leaders steer clear of sarcasm: they always take the high road. If they do make fun of someone, it's usually themselves. They have learned the lesson that reckless humour can be misinterpreted and backfire. They know that critics of the organization can turn inappropriate remarks back on a leader who makes them.

10 Be confident and dependable. Somehow, over and above the daily struggle, leaders who get teams to click project confidence. They do this by preparing their conversations and not backing away from, or skimming over, real issues and problems, even difficult or confronting ones. They always address 'What's up?' and 'What's so?' in the organization. They don't try to be spin doctors because they know that, ultimately, this doesn't work. Rather, they are known as straight shooters - people who play hard, fight fair, and never, never give up. At the end of the day, team members know that, whatever happens, their leader will be left standing. This gives them confidence that they will be standing, too. They also know that, should things get really bad, their leader will not desert them or try to shift the blame, but seek to protect them, even if it means standing in the line of fire.

10 Techniques for Building High-Performing Teams

01 Define a clear picture of the future
02 Be genuine and comfortable with being vulnerable
03 Ask good questions
04 Talk – even if it is hard
05 Follow through on commitments
06 Let others speak first
07 Listen
08 Manage non-performance
09 Have fun
10 Be confident and dependable

Facts about companies with high performing teams:

22% *higher profitability*

10% *higher customer satisfaction levels*

37% *lower absenteeism*

25% - 65% *lower turnover*

21% *greater productivity*

A STUDY OF WHETHER, AND HOW MEETINGS ARE HELD IN A THINKING ENVIRONMENT

BY EMILY HAVERS

The Thinking Environment is a set of conditions that purport to help people to think well for themselves. It was developed by Nancy Kline and her company Time to Think and is the product of the discovery that in order for people to think clearly and independently, the people around them need to behave in certain ways. Nancy depicts ten ways that she claims are fairly depend-able in this regard and these have become known as the Ten Components of a Thinking Environment. The need to think well for ourselves in various aspects of our work and lives encouraged Time to Think to develop several applications of the Thinking Environment. One of these applications, called Transforming Meetings, creates a Thinking Environment in meetings. It works with a number of Principles and Behaviours to embody the Ten Components and so to generate people's best thinking in a meeting environment. The primary research found that Thinking Environment meetings provide a positive and appreciative environment, in which people listen generatively to their colleagues, equality is fostered, feelings can be expressed produc-tively, there is a sense of ease, and underlying assumptions are uncovered and examined.

> ### The 10 components of a Thinking Environment:
>
> ① Attention
> ② Ease
> ③ Equality
> ④ Appreciation
> ⑤ Encouragement
> ⑥ Feelings
> ⑦ Information
> ⑧ Diversity
> ⑨ Incisive Questions

Aspects of organisational life that were found to be profoundly affected might be summarised as the effectiveness of meetings, the quality of ideas, solutions and decisions, the equality or otherwise of relationships, the clarity and independence of thinking in an organisation, individual motivation and development, the relationship between an individual and the organisation, the quality of conversations, the organisational culture and organisational performance.

Do Thinking Environment meetings strengthen the efficacy of an organisation?

The performance of an organisation

Perhaps the most obvious measure of the efficacy of an organisation is its performance. Here the primary research found that Thinking Environment meetings have, or are expected to have, a positive impact on organisational performance in 95% of cases. It also suggested that Thinking Environment meetings are generative and productive, adding value to the organisation and to its people.

Team development
The efficacy of an organisation may also be strengthened through the development of its teams. The presentation of the data contrasted dysfunc-tional meetings of old, where one or two dominant voices attended to personal agendas with value-add, relationship enhancing meetings of new where everyone contributes, there is group responsibility for the agenda items and people are valued and appreciated. These distinctions might be associated with the difference between the Assertion and Cooperation stages in John Whitmore's team development model or perhaps the difference between Storming and Performing in Tuckman's model. High performance team and team coaching literature often focus on interventions that move teams through the stages of team development. The experiences of the interviewees would suggest that Thinking Environment meetings contribute significantly to this movement. Indeed, the discipline, consistency and openness of Thinking Environment meetings might help new teams and new team members to integrate more quickly, considerably. The significance of the interviewees experience of their thinking being enhanced in these meetings might also suggest that the concept of thinking well deserves much greater attention in the discipline associated with the development of teams, researchers and practitioners alike.

Team performance
Katzenbach and Smith, possibly the forefathers of the team perfor-mance literature highlighted that what sets high performance teams apart "is the degree of commitment, particularly how committed the members are to one another. Such commitments go well beyond civility and teamwork. Each genuinely helps the others to achieve personal and professional goals." Although, perhaps not expressed precisely in this way, the findings presented from this research suggested that Thinking Environment meetings do generate personal engage-ment and commitment and nurture respectful relationships. In this way it might be concluded that Thinking Environment meetings are conducive to the development of high performance teams as they foster the critical component of commitment. Extant research has also shown that diverse teams outperform homo-geneous teams, but diverse teams that are not well managed will be outper-formed by homogenous teams that are well managed. The findings presented here suggested that Thinking Environment meetings are capable of maximiz-ing diversity in a well managed way: most importantly interviewees reported the creation of equality of voice, the minority voice being heard and people engaging respectfully. Peter Hawkins and Nick Smith emphasise that an effective team meeting does not equate to an effective team. The evidence presented here which suggested that learnings and practices from Thinking Environment meetings extend beyond the meetings into organisational life and personal lives is a significant finding in this regard. It seems to suggest that Thinking Environment meetings do not suffer from this potential shortcoming.

DRIVING SUCCESS: THE INCREDIBLE POWER OF COMPANY-WIDE GOAL ALIGNMENT AND GOAL SETTING (EXTRACT)

BY ENTERPRISE INSIGHT SERIES & ORACLE

"A mere 7%of employees today fully understand their company's business strategies and what's expected of them in order to help achieve company goals."

Why is an organizational focus on goal setting so critical? An organization in which all employees understand and act upon their roles and potential to adhere to the business strategy, in which everyone is travelling in the same direction, is unstoppable.

The Top Three Business Benefits of Clearly Setting and Aligning Goals Across Your Company:

1. Increased Operating Margins

Employees who clearly understand their individual goals—and how they relate to those of your company—naturally become more engaged with their work. Once employees see how they can make a direct contribution to your company's success, they begin to focus on finding ways to work smarter and more efficiently. This boost in employee productivity will naturally lead to increased operating margins and profitability for your company. To achieve these results, your company must put a performance management process in place that: Increases employee engagement with "SMART" goals; Provides visibility up, down and across reporting levels; Creates shared accountability between employees by "cascading" goals from one employee to another when relevant; and Communicates expectations clearly during every phase of goal completion.

2. Quicker Execution of Company Strategy

Tighter goal alignment and goal visibility allows for quicker execution of company strategy by enabling your management team to more effectively allocate labour resources across various projects. By exposing redundant business initiatives, it also increases overall efficiency by ensuring employees are not duplicating the efforts of others. Plus, goal alignment strengthens the leadership at your company by allowing managers to: Understand more clearly all responsibilities associated with specific goals; Eliminate redundancies across job titles; and Focus their staffs on your company's most pertinent goals.

3. Reduced Employee Turnover

The business value of having employees engaged in their work cannot be overestimated. As proof, a recent Gallup poll showed that companies with large numbers of dissatisfied workers experience greater absenteeism and lower productivity—as well as a 51% higher employee turnover rate. Fortunately, clear goal alignment can remedy this situation by helping to create greater employee ownership in your company's ultimate success. Goal alignment also lets you establish a true pay-for-performance culture at your company by providing the foundation for closely linking reward systems with both individual and team performance.

Aligning Goals…

The process of goal alignment provides checkpoints to assure that all members of a team—at any level—are working in parallel toward the achievement of a goal. Goal alignment guides goal setting in the same direction so that every individual and team work purposefully toward meaningful contribution, as opposed to just working. Alignment keeps everyone on the same road and discourages the divergence and distraction that can derail progress toward planned business results.

Writing SMART Goals

On the journey toward achieving great business results, well-written goals are the fuel that drives performance. It's quite likely that you have heard of SMART goals and that you've travelled this way before. You may even be thinking, "Oh no! Not SMART goals again!" What else is there to know?

What Are SMART Goals? Most reviews of SMART goals explain the acronym this way: it stands for specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time bound. The SMART acronym is an easy way to remember key elements of effective goals. There is generally conceptual agreement about what SMART stands for, but there is room to make this model one that reflects the practice, personality, and culture of your organization. Think about the original acronym. Are there words that are more appropriate for your workforce?

• S can also refer to "stretch," "significant," or "synergistic."

• M also might mean "meaningful" or "motivating."

• A can also represent "action-oriented," "agreed upon," or "accountable."

• R might mean "relevant," "rewarding," or "results-oriented."

• T can mean "tangible" or "thoughtful."

Some organizations expand the acronym to include additional concepts:
• SMARTER, where the E means "engaging" and the second R means "rewarding."

• SMART-C, where C means "challenging" or "collaborative."

• SMART-S, where S means "stretch," "sustainable," or "significant."

• SMAART, where the second A stands for "actionable."

Glenn Hughes, director of global learning for KLA-Tencor, introduced a SET SMART methodology to broaden the scope of goal setting to include the external market as well as the internal culture. The added acronym represents the following:
• **S: Does it "scare" the competition?**

• **E: Does it "engage" the employee?**

• **T: Does it "thrill" customers?**

Is it time for your business to take a look at recasting SMART goals to be more compatible with your culture? Wherever your company settles in this debate, make sure that you communicate throughout the organization not only the "what" of your corporate SMART goal approach, but also the "why."

Exceed The Bar (Pty) Ltd
Reg 2022/676207/07
info@exceedthebar.com
www.exceedthebar.com

GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK (EXTRACT)

BY ENROLLMENT SERVICES TRAINING

Feedback is an essential element for everyone in an organization's workforce. Giving feedback is a task you perform again and again as a manager or supervisor, letting people know where they are and where to go next in terms of expectations and goals - yours, their own, and the organizations. Feedback is a useful tool for indicating when things are going in the right direction or for redirecting problem performance. Your objective in giving feedback is to provide guidance by supplying information in a useful manner, either to support effective behaviour, or to guide someone back on track toward successful performance.

THE SIX STEP METHOD FOR GIVING CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

Step 1: State the constructive purpose of your feedback.
State your purpose briefly by indicating what you'd like to cover and why it's important. If you are *initiating* feedback, this focus keeps the other person from having to guess what you want to talk about. If the other person has *requested* feedback, a focusing statement will make sure that you direct your feedback toward what the person needs.

Step 2: Describe specifically what you have observed.
Have a certain event or action in mind and be able to say when and where it happened, who was involved, and what the results were. Stick to what you personally observed and don't try to speak for others. Avoid talking vaguely about what the person "always" or "usually" does.

Step 3: Describe your reactions.
Explain the consequences of the other person's behaviour and how you feel about it. Give examples of how you and others are affected. When you describe your reactions or the consequences of the observed behaviours, the other person can better appreciate the impact their actions are having on others and on the organization or team.

Step 4: Give the other person an opportunity to respond.
Remain silent and meet the other person's eye, indicating that you are waiting for answer. If the person hesitates to respond, ask an open ended question.

Step 5: Offer specific suggestions.
Whenever possible make your suggestions helpful by including practical, feasible examples. Offering suggestions shows that you have thought past your evaluations and moved to how to improve the situation. Even if people are working up to expected standards, they often benefit from ideas that could help them to perform better. Use your common sense and offer an idea if you think the other person will find it useful. Don't drum up a suggestion for improvement just for the sake of it.

Step 6: Summarize and express your support
Review the major points you discussed. Summarize the action items, not the negative points of the other person's behaviour. If you have given neutral feedback, emphasize the main points you have wanted to convey. For corrective feedback, stress the main things you've discussed that the person could do differently. End on a positive note by com-

---

Test driving your skills....

Look for an opportunity to test out your ability to give constructive feedback to one of your team members.

⇒ Overall, how did it go?
⇒ How was the feedback received?
⇒ What worked particularly well?
⇒ What did you find difficult or challenging?
⇒ What would you do differently going forward?

RECEIVING FEEDBACK (EXTRACT)

"We all need people who will give us feedback. That's how we improve."
- Bill Gates

Questions for personal reflection…

- Does my preferred leadership style enable me to build a high performing team?

- Do I create a Thinking Environment in which each member of my team feels safe and engaged?

- Do I spend enough time aligning my team around shared goals?

- Do I ensure that each team member knows what their individual role is in achieving company/BU goals?

- Would SMART goals work for my team?

- Do I provide constructive feedback to my team members?

- How comfortable am I with receiving feedback from others?

BY D. BOUD

There is no point in asking others to give you feedback unless you are prepared to be open to it and to consider comments which differ from your own perceptions. As receiver:

Be explicit
Make it clear what kind of feedback you are seeking. If necessary indicate what kinds you do not want to receive. The feedback from others is entirely for your benefit and if you do not indicate what you want you are unlikely to get it.

Be attentive
Concentrate fully on what is being said. Focus on what the person wants you to know, not on what you would like to hear.

Be aware
Notice your own reactions, both intellectual and emotional. Particularly notice any reactions of rejection or censorship on your part. If the viewpoint from which the other is speaking is at variance with your own do not dismiss it: it can be important to realise the misapprehensions of others. Some people find it useful to partially dissociate or distance themselves in this situation and act as if they were witnessing feedback being given to someone else.

Be silent
Refrain from making a response. Don't even begin to frame a response in your own mind until you have listened carefully to what has been said and have considered the implications. Don't use the excuse of correcting factual errors to avoid hearing and resonating with the substance of what has been said. Don't be distracted by the need to explain: if you continue to feel that you need

WHICH SKILL DO I WANT TO DEVELOP THAT WILL ENABLE MY TEAM TO PERFORM AT A HIGHER LEVEL?

WHAT ARE THE NEXT THREE STEPS I NEED TO TAKE ALONG THE PATH TOWARDS LEADING MY TEAM BETTER?

THE FIRST STEP I WILL TAKE TODAY TOWARD MY GOAL IS…

Exceed The Bar (Pty) Ltd
Reg 2022/676207/07
Contact us to help you enhance the performance of teams in your organisation
info@exceedthebar.com
www.exceedthebar.com