EYE 2 EYE DEVELOPMENT

How do you manage churn in teams?

This was a burning issue during a session called "Revving up Team Performance" which we ran for a forum of HR professionals.

Losing a team member is never easy. It creates pressure – covering their workload, recruiting a new person, enabling them to settle in and get up to speed quickly. It costs a lot. And what's the impact on the effectiveness of a team when someone moves on? How can you sustain team performance?

There doesn't seem to be a lot of current research specifically relating to team performance (and we would love to hear from you if you have found some). But a snippet from onboarding research (predominantly US focused) caused me to sit up and think about the impact on individuals, teams, and the organisation. ***"40 percent of executives hired at the senior level are pushed out, fail, or quit within 18 months"*** **(Masters, Brooke 2009).** Think about the total cost of that – I think you can easily get to £0.5M when you think about salary, hiring costs, the cost of missed opportunity and less than fully effective contribution let alone the ripple effects in the organisation.

Creating a high performing team takes time and conscious effort – we've talked in previous blogs about the importance of shared direction, a common purpose and a way of working together that creates psychological safety so the gritty, messy conversations can happen. And that takes trust – something that isn't built overnight.

Both Tuckman's model (Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing) and Dr M Scott Peck's Community Building model (pseudo community, chaos emptiness, true community) emphasise that when a group or team changes, it's like someone has pressed the reset button. In some senses, it's like creating a new team.

A new team member brings fresh perspectives and a new dynamic to the team. And they won't have the depth of understanding of what this team is seeking to achieve together, how they plan to go about it and the implicit rules of 'how things get done around here'. This isn't touchy feely stuff ***– it's the business of a team powerfully delivering a shared agenda together and holding each other to***

account. So how can you speed up the process and help the new member of your team to get up to speed quickly so that the whole team performs?

I think it's worth extending your attention beyond a handover and an induction programme focused on deliverables and the fundamental practicalities (though how many of us have stories of arriving in a business to find we don't have a phone or a laptop?). Here are a few thoughts:

- **Handle endings thoughtfully:** How a team member is treated when they leave affects the team. Handled badly, it can leave scars and undermine trust and create a lingering kind of guilt. It's a bit like William Bridges thinking for Transitions – it's important to mark the ending and let go in order for everyone to move on. So, ask yourself what would acknowledge and honour this person's contribution? After all, you would not be where you are without them. Of course, there's the corporate email that goes out and often leaving drinks or even a meal. And what else? I've seen leaders take time to genuinely appreciate a team member's contributions and qualities publicly with the team.

- **Take time to re-create the team:** Strong foundations matter so that everyone is on the same page. Two starting points we recommend are:

- **Retest and agree your shared purpose**. Understanding why you do what you do, and your shared agenda will give renewed focus to the team. I've seen many creative ways of doing this from each team member sharing their version of this and a story to illustrate to drawing a visual representation of their "why" (much more memorable than the written word). The essence seems to be making it vivid and having dialogue and conversation. The new team member can be invited to ask questions and offer challenge to enhance it.

- **Build foundations of trust and openness**. Sometimes this is dismissed as "touchy feely" – and if team members don't know each other's strengths, the capabilities they bring and how to work well together, assumptions and misinterpretations can arise which quickly create factions and silos within the team. To create the conditions for openness and the safety for the messy, real conversations to happen – I think it's crucial that team members have a sense of what makes each other tick.

This can be very practical. One example I saw recently was asking a new leader to share their early observations about the organisation with the team they had joined. This gave them profile, gave the team insight into their thinking style, and held a mirror up to some of the things that existing team members might no longer notice. And I would build on this. Firstly, ask "So what?" – a presentation is useful. How can the team make use of this? Setting aside time to explore how they have come to those conclusions, what rings true and what to do about it means that you go beyond visibility and insight and into making the most of the fresh perspectives. It also builds shared commitment.

This is a great opportunity to create a positive environment. Adding 10 minutes for each person in the team to share 1 quality they noticed in the new team member (e.g. the pithiness of their analysis of the key issues) starts to build openness and makes explicit some of the things that this person can continue to contribute to the team.

There's a lot more you can and should do. One way to ensure you cover all bases is to look at the 8 areas of Effective Team Performance in the Team Health Check and ask yourself where the team might need to pay attention and build strength. Help the new team member to build their network –

quickly! The more senior, the more vital this is because their role often relies on influencing and joining the dots so that their teams are freed up to deliver. ***"According to one estimate, 60 per cent of managers who fail to onboard successfully cite failure to establish effective working relationships as a primary reason".*** (SHRM Foundation guide)

I will never forget a boss at Intel who arrived to head up the HR function in EMEA. One of his first questions was ***"Who are the important people I need to meet?"*** He spent the first few weeks meeting with them 1:1, asking questions and seeking to understand their challenges, aims and building a picture of what might be needed in the organisation. He quickly understood the informal influencing networks. When I moved organisations, I copied this approach and created relationships, which endure even now. So, ***who are the key people this person needs to connect with to succeed?*** (Drawing a stakeholder map can help here) And ***who in your team might be able to support them in understanding how to navigate this organisation?***

And I realise this isn't the whole answer. It's important to have clarity on role, objectives, and deliverables. And my experience is that ***often we major on task focus and overlook the need to create the foundations of quality of connection and relationship that enable teams and organisations to thrive. In my view, organisations are social systems, finding ways to interact to deliver great results.*** You overlook that at your peril.

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For more fresh thinking, resources and practical tools visit https://eye2eyedev.com/resources/
Want to know how to avoid silo thinking and things falling through gaps? Check out our article on Practical approach to clarifying roles and responsibilities in teams

References:

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Alyse Ashton and Richard Spence are the co-authors of the Team Health Check and draw on over 50 years' combined experience as team coaches and facilitators working with global organisations.

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