

Team Effectiveness: predicted to be the top challenge – and how the right purpose helps



'The effectiveness of management teams... has just overtaken organisation-wide leadership capability as the most cited challenge.'

Henley Business School, Corporate Learning Survey 2016

In the Henley report, 439 respondents from 47 countries predict management team effectiveness will be the top challenge in the next three years for companies up to 500 employees. This comes a close second to 'Leadership capability' for larger companies. The predicted use of team coaching has seen the greatest overall rise since last year's key findings.

Yet the research also shows that the preference for developing individuals rather than teams is still prevalent. There is a big upswing in respondents predicting that senior-level succession planning will be an objective. In the ranking of development priorities for leaders, 'Developing the team' is ranked sixth for senior leaders while for high potentials, it's all the way down at thirteenth.

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Not surprising, then, that the report concludes: ***'A significant question to arise from the findings of this survey is how organisations can ... not only develop individuals but... bring about broader development processes that align executive development with organisational strategy.'***

So, what are the shifting sands that make effective management teams so critical? What does it take to develop them when so much individual focus remains? Let's take an example.

Five of the team are in London, five on video from New York, one on the phone from Singapore, another calls in from India. I've been asked to coach this team on leading in the matrix in their global organisation and with key stakeholders, but it's a challenge for them just to manage their own virtual and remote working, especially with the company going through yet another change. Although the MD makes sure to involve everyone, the team are struck by how rarely they speak together. For me, it's a classic case for building team effectiveness: time shared as a team would pay dividends over individual development in delivering coherence and results.

Back in 2011, Deloitte analysed the *'multidirectional, flexible and expansive nature of how successful organizations work today'* and flagged the radical changes affecting teams at every level. Companies have flatter structures than before. Teams are no longer in set places or working set hours but dispersed across multiple locations and time-zones. Non-routine tasks far outpace routine and project work has increased forty-fold in twenty years. As a result: ***for the team to be effective, collaboration and agility are ever more crucial.***

So how do you develop this?

The Henley survey offers some insight, advocating significant development to establish 'a team with a shared purpose or goal which is more than the sum of the individual parts and where the team can service the needs of the organisation better than people working individually'. This is supported by agreeing ways of working and communicating. ***'Once the individuals are indeed a functioning team'***, says Dr Patricia Bossons, ***'Team coaching can help lift that team to achieve its clear strategic purpose.'***

This concurs with our research and experience. We see that ***teams which achieve high performance are never insular: they identify what's going on outside the team, know what they are working to achieve and why. They create space for each other to speak, are courageous to confront reality and have frank conversations. They build trust through respect and being sufficiently open with each other to reveal weaknesses and ask for help.***

We back Dr Bossons' underlining that this takes time and her aim of strategic purpose.

But what kind of purpose really motivates teams to high performance?

In my experience, organisations often fall into the trap of an inward-looking purpose ('the best widget maker in the world') or one that graces the corporate website but never gets far into the guts of the company. The team I cited earlier enjoyed their interaction and sharing of ideas but worried they had no idea where their division was going or how its churning wheels linked to any more noble purpose than getting stuff done. Collaboration was limited, and it was left to their leader to create team spirit and keep them going.

To develop effective management teams, what organisations need is enough true outward focus to define their purpose as 'the positive difference this organisation is called on to make in the world'. They need to create goals and strategy to support the purpose and then live it at every level of the organisation.

To achieve this may well demand courageous challenge both upwards from teams and from those of us who develop them. But when teams clearly align their purpose to serve a greater purpose, a motivating energy moves through them. Buoyed by a bigger shared direction, they will take more collective accountability, find reason to have the difficult conversations and focus on results that are worth achieving.

In the Henley survey, the top priorities for senior leaders' development are the foggy and familiar 'Leadership capabilities' and 'Leading in a complex, uncertain environment'. ***For leaders and, critically, the development of effective management teams, a truly motivating purpose provides fuel and a unifying compass through the fog.***

Richard Spence

If you liked this you might like exploring a practical tool for building more effective teams and their purpose (in resources, teams)

References:

You can download a PDF of the Henley Corporate Learning Survey 2016 at:

www.henley.ac.uk/files/pdf/exec-ed/Corporate_Learning_Survey_2016_report_final_WEB.pdf

You'll find the Deloitte article on the 'Corporate Lattice' (2011): <https://dupress.deloitte.com/dup-us-en/deloitte-review/issue-8/the-corporate-lattice-rethinking-careers-in-the-changing-world-of-work.htm>

For more fresh thinking, resources and practical tools visit <https://eye2eyedev.com/resources/>

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