system@ic™
IDEA GENERATION ● PROBLEM SOLVING ● INNOVATION

Temporary 'High Performance Teams'

Creating efficient and productive temporary teams

I was recently engaged by a client to run a series of workshops that brought together a dozen or so of the brightest of minds at the sharp end of the nuclear decommissioning industry. The purpose of the series of workshops was to challenge the current design for a new waste processing plant and to generate new, innovative ways to carry out the making safe of a substantial amount of highly toxic waste.

The first workshop involved a tour of the proposed facility, followed by a session to set the scene for the challenge team. During this initial session, a guest proposed his concern that the size of the team and the nature of the challenge would make it difficult for the group to become a High Performing Team (HPT). Based upon previous experience I had immediate misgivings and have pondered upon this for some time since. I now believe it is undoubtedly possible to create 'temporary' High Performance Teams that can quickly be up and running and upon reflection this accounts for a vast majority of the work that I currently undertake.

In 1965 it was Bruce Tuckman who first proposed the popular 'Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing' model. He maintained that these phases are all necessary and inevitable in order for the team to face up to challenges, tackle problems, find solutions, plan work and deliver results. All of which are required in the workshops that I run.

I actually wholly support Bruce Tuckman's model and have worked with it with clients on numerous occasions. However, for the aforementioned challenge team, time constraints meant that there simply wasn't time for the team to develop through the four stages. I would actually argue that for the purpose for which the team was created, it was not necessary for them to be a High Performance Team in the pure sense of the term. Their purpose was to come together on a number of occasions to think/work effectively and productively in order to develop some powerful ideas/concepts that would help solve some really tough challenges.

Albeit the challenge team would still have to face up to challenges, tackle problems, find solutions, plan work and deliver results.

The big question is how do you successfully manage to get an unfamiliar team to demonstrate the characteristics of a High Performance Team with ease and on demand? Broadly speaking there are three parts to the answer.

Firstly, the identification and buy in to the behavioral aspects that will enable *this* team to meet and think as efficiently and productively as possible is

essential (most of these are common sense but often not common practice). By asking the team to identify the behaviors for themselves that will both help and hinder efficiency and productivity and making these explicit, buy in is typically easy to achieve and the adherence to these behaviors is easier to manage. The helping behaviors are acceptable and encouraged and the hindering behaviors are unacceptable and banned. Simple.

Secondly, the application of productive and efficient systematic approaches to thinking, idea generation and problem solving is equally essential.

Thirdly, the team needs to be well facilitated to keep thing on track and there is much to consider here. Amongst other things it is essential that the facilitator ensures:

- There is a clear and inspirational vision for the team
- Adherence to the behavioural aspects
- A clear and understood focus at all times
- The effective selection and application of systematic tools and processes to maximize idea/concept output and/or solutions to problems
- Thinking is complimentary as opposed to adversarial
- Everyone contributes
- Decisions are by consensus
- Roles and responsibilities are understood
- The management of time
- ALL output is captured
- The effective selection and prioritisation of ideas/concepts and solutions

By following the above guidelines, it becomes easy for a team to display the characteristics of a High Performance Team, albeit on a temporary basis.

About us

Passionate about thinking efficiency and productivity

We help people do their best thinking. Evolving from a 25 year background in Management Consultancy, we have developed and refined a powerful set of systematic thinking tools and processes and combine these with a unique understanding of individual and group behaviours that when 'managed' enable others to achieve outstanding results.

We work globally and across a wide spectrum of industries supporting endeavours such as innovation, creativity and problem solving (including those of a ridiculously technical nature).

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