

What is a High-Performing Team?

The phrase 'high-performing team' is prevalent in business circles, and with good reason. What leader wants a low-performing team after all? Many businesses have average-performing teams that do what's required but little more. And then there are high-performing teams, the ones that stand head and shoulders above the rest.

Every leader wants to have a high-performing team, but what does that look like?

If you take the time to consider truly great teams, you might find yourself thinking of the 1990s Chicago Bulls basketball team, within which Michael Jordan was a central figure, or perhaps Microsoft under the leadership of Bill Gates. Although these teams contained well-known names, those individuals alone could not have achieved even half of what they did without the support of those around them. These teams worked collaboratively towards exceptional results, sharing clear objectives, communicating openly and fostering a culture of trust and respect among members.

BEST TEAMS

Michael Jordan would not have achieved so much without his teammates like Dennis Rodman, Scottie Pippin and Toni Kukoč, not to mention the Bulls' head coach Phil Jackson directing from off the court. Nor would Bill Gates have been able to lead Microsoft to such great heights had he not valued the contributions of those across every team and level at the organisation. He recognised that a team of the best people working closely together could achieve far more than he ever could alone.

I have been observing the attributes of high-performing teams for many years and have realised that they are all underpinned by three central elements. They have people who feel empowered, they have clearly defined processes and they nurture supportive cultures.

But what is it about those three elements that makes them crucial to creating and maintaining high-performing teams?

I always begin by focusing on empowered people. We need to acknowledge that high-performing teams consist of individuals with unique strengths collaborating seamlessly with one another. This was one of Gates' greatest strengths as a leader. Each member should have a strong work ethic, be given autonomy, have integrity and a growth mindset.

However, talented individuals on their own aren't enough to create a high-performing team. These talented individuals need to be supported and guided by clearly defined processes to ensure that tasks are completed with precision and consistency. Even in the modern world of working, where flexibility is prized by many, teams still need structure. High-performing teams have established processes which ensure that high-quality communication, goal setting, accountability and recognition are consistently delivered throughout the organisation.

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Finally, there is the glue that holds it all together, namely a nurturing and supportive culture. Within a high-performance culture, members feel valued, respected and supported. They are, therefore, more likely to communicate openly, take ownership of their work and collaborate effectively. High-performing teams prioritise cultivating a culture of resilience, psychological safety, inclusion and a One Team Ethos.

Although I have broken the components of a high-performing team down into the three crucial elements of empowered people, defined processes and a supportive culture, the truth is that these three elements are deeply intertwined. You'll not only notice this within my Best Teams Model (see Figure 1.1), but also hear how these elements interact in the real world through the leaders I've interviewed for this book.

Before we go any further, take a minute to consider your team. Do you have any of these elements in place? Perhaps you have all three and, if you do, are you consistently reviewing them to ensure that your team continues to operate at its optimum?



Figure 1.1 The elements of the Best Teams Model

The Business Case for High-Performing Teams

Creating high-performing teams is more than a nice-to-have. It's a business imperative. The business case for high-performing teams feels intuitive, but there is also hard evidence, which backs up how high-performing teams provide a powerful advantage for both companies and employees.

Let's start with the obvious measures: productivity and profitability.

According to research undertaken by Gallup, highly engaged teams are 21% more profitable than their less engaged counterparts. Additionally, such teams achieve 17% higher productivity and a 41% decrease in absenteeism, which can have a direct positive impact on an organisation's operational effectiveness and financial health.¹

But it doesn't stop there. When your organisation is made up of high-performing teams, your customers also tend to be happier. Research shows that engaged and high-performing teams directly enhance customer loyalty. In fact, companies with high employee engagement report a 233% greater rate of customer loyalty.² Of course, customer loyalty has a positive impact on a business' bottom line.

But high-performing teams don't only help your organisation make more money, they also prevent you from losing money. Analysis by the Project Management Institute (PMI) found that high-performing organisations that use proven project, program and portfolio management practices (in other words have defined processes in their businesses) see their projects meeting their goals and business intent 2.5 times more frequently than other organisations. What's

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more, these high-performing companies waste 13 times *less* money than their lower-performing counterparts.³

So, if you have high-performing teams in your organisation, not only are they likely to get more work done, but they are also likely to help your business earn more money. The question then becomes, what do you need to do to embed those three overarching elements in your teams?

