

HIGH PERFORMING TEAMS: CHARACTERISTICS

HIGH PERFORMING TEAMS SHARE THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS

People have solid and deep trust in each other and in the team's purpose. They feel free to express feelings and ideas. Everybody is working toward the same goals. Team members are clear on how to work together and how to accomplish tasks.

An article on ten characteristics of high-performing teams (1) delves into a little more detail. In a high performing team there is strong:

- Communication
- Comprehension
- Collaboration
- Creativity
- Confidence

WHAT CAN CAUSE THINGS TO GO AWRY?

Imagine groups of people, teams or companies who are working towards the same objective, but not sharing information with each other; people not talking to other people. This is a silo mentality.(2)

This article from the site Investopedia(3) has a great definition:

"Silo mentality ... occurs when several departments or groups within an organisation do not want to share information or knowledge with other individuals in the same organization. A silo mentality reduces the organisation's efficiency and can contribute to a failing corporate culture."

WHY IS THIS A PROBLEM?

Silo mentality leads to missed opportunities, wasted time and cost, and can reflect negatively on a business. It negatively affects employee morale, especially when employees are aware of the issue and are unable to do anything to change it.

Where duties lie between departments, intentional silo mentality occurs when people withhold information from other departments. A lack of cross-departmental communication can negatively impact workflow, with information not passing freely across the organisation. This can result in departments working with inaccurate or out-of-date information.



OUR TEAMS

Managers of successful businesses ensure that information flows freely between departments so all aspects of the company function effectively.

Contemporary management views suggest that the silo mentality must be broken for employees to remain motivated and be happy to come to work. Efficient companies promote the sharing of information to let the combination of groups within the business function as a team.

An article 4 Warning Signs Your Team Is Working in Silos (4) helps by providing the following insights:

1. Redundant steps

The most painful and silo-revealing phrase you'll ever hear is, "My team did that too. I thought it was our responsibility." Redundant steps and duplicated work are costly, and not just from a bottom-line perspective. They also undercut unity and leave valuable teams frustrated and in opposition.

To free yourself from duplicating work, always assign specific tasks to specific people and include specific due dates. A great formula to follow is: "Who will do what, by when - and how will we check in about the next step?" Dropping any of those elements is a recipe for a silo.

There are tools out there specifically designed to facilitate communication between employees wherever they are. When you are trying to open up lines of communication between separated groups, convenience and efficiency are especially important, because everyone has to be on the same page. In practice this could be as simple as your notice board, newsletter, daily team huddle or weekly team meeting.

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In between practices or in a large practice, Google Drive is an example of a tool that accomplishes these goals. The Documents feature, for example, allows for multiple users to edit a single document simultaneously and in real time.

2. Misaligned priorities

Shared priorities are a challenge for teams and individuals alike. Whether it's a lack of clear inter-departmental goals or even intra-departmental competition, not working from the same page on the same priorities divides people at all levels. Defining each project's 'big picture' outcomes and revisiting those goals as frequently as possible are the only cures for misaligned priorities. As simple as this sounds, it's shocking how often these are left murky, unclear, or even worse, unspoken.

If you're a leader, don't be fooled into thinking all your goals have to come from the top down. Instead, include your teams in the priority-setting process itself. Confluence is one of the few tools that not only allows you to assign and manage your workflow, but collaborate on the goals behind it. Collaboration is indispensable.

In addition to rallying teams around the same objectives, having overarching goals enables you and your leaders to outline the specific, small-scale tasks necessary to achieve those goals.

3. Limited collaboration

Much has been written about how essential collaboration is for success, both personally and professionally. The truth is informal collaboration alone simply is not sufficient to keep businesses healthy and competitive. Instead, leading organisations actively foster collaboration by structuring it into their workflow. Through multidiscipline projects, teams learn exactly how their colleagues contribute to the success of the business as a whole.

One study revealed that employee productivity and satisfaction increases by 15 percent and 13 percent respectively when collaboration is formalised as a cornerstone. Also - get strategic about the way you communicate within and between teams.



4. Dangerous groupthink

Psychology Today(5) says of groupthink:

"Groupthink occurs when a group with a particular agenda makes irrational or problematic

decisions because its members value harmony and coherence over accurate analysis and critical evaluation. Individual members of the group are strongly discouraged from any disagreement with the consensus and set aside their own thoughts and feelings to unquestioningly follow the word of the leader and other group members.

"In a groupthink situation, group members refrain from expressing doubts, judgments or disagreement with the consensus and ignore any ethical or moral consequences of any group decision that furthers their cause. Risk taking is common, and the lack of creativity and independent thinking have negative personal and political implications for both group members and outsiders. Groupthink decisions rarely have successful outcomes."

Innovation gets suppressed and a zero-analysis "we-must-be-right" environment is born. The prevalence of groupthink can also lead to an environment where disagreement is looked down on as a negative instead of a positive. As businesswoman Margaret Heffernan puts it in her TED Talk(6), disagreement isn't just necessary to problem solving -- it's actually "a kind of love."

The best way to avoid groupthink means letting your teams into the room when hard decisions need to be hashed out. It also means rewarding disagreement, celebrating differences and making it clear that you, as a leader, don't have all the answers.



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In summary:

No matter the cause, workplace silos have the ability to destroy teamwork, communication and success. Use these tips to break down silos before they can unravel the tight-knit team you strive to lead.

The Forbes magazine article *The Silo Mentality: How to Break Down The Barriers* (7) gives us a great summary based around four traits: "The famous quote by Francis Bacon "knowledge is power" has a pivotal role in modern organisations. There are a few key factors in creating a thriving and productive team; knowledge, collaboration, creativity, and confidence. Without these four basic factors any team is destined to fail. To encourage your teams to exhibit all four of these traits it is recommended that management allows and fosters cross-departmental interaction. The exchange of knowledge and the collaboration that will inevitably take place between teams is absolutely priceless."



RESOURCES

- (1) https://www.huffingtonpost.com/carl-wiese/10-characteristics-of-high-performing-teams_b_1536155.html
- (2) <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/what-do-we-mean-working-silos-dan-hughes/>
- (3) <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/silo-mentality.asp>
- (4) <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/250477>
- (5) <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/basics/groupthink>
- (6) https://www.ted.com/talks/margaret_heffernan_dare_to_disagree/transcript?language=en
- (7) <https://www.forbes.com/sites/brentgleeson/2013/10/02/the-silo-mentality-how-to-break-down-the-barriers/2/#5503cc99df2e>

FURTHER READING

<https://www.strategyand.pwc.com/media/file/Dealing-with-market-disruption.pdf>