

Six Considerations for Nurturing High Performing Teams

Those of us who have been a part of high performing, innovative teams know the exhilaration of reducing time-to-market, cutting out unnecessary processes and costs, and simply producing better products for our customers through improved collaboration. So how do we create those innovative teams, who not only vastly improve our business but also energize our workers?

It is easy to quantify the return on investment of building a high performance team. From top line revenue to bottom line savings, and reducing time spent throughout almost any process, the numbers will tell your story.

SIX CONSIDERATIONS FOR NURTURING HIGH PERFORMING TEAMS

1. Innovation: Set your strategy
2. Environment: Support teams with the right culture and management methodology
3. Organization: Seek out and connect your innovators
4. Resources: Take advantage of enabling technology
5. Process: Enable easy knowledge management
6. Integrate: Leverage the value from intellectual assets



Consider the following facts

- A European auto manufacturer recently experienced a 300 percent improvement in repair cycle through real time collaboration with dealerships.
- An airframe manufacturer has taken two days of wait time out of production by connecting suppliers to the production floor.
- One of the largest offshore oil and gas exploration corporations has saved \$400 million through enhanced communication and improved collaborative decision making.

Teams like those do not happen by chance. Building and fostering innovation and collaboration in a work environment is a challenge, as well as a true learning process. Like all learning processes, it is subject to all of the elements that may “make or break” success.

Six best practices for building the right environment to nurture your own high performance teams

1. Innovation: Set your strategy

Are you focused on developing a new product? A new process? A new business model? As tempting as it may seem, nobody can compete on all dimensions. What is your core competence? Knowing where you compete today will help you decide where to invest in innovation. Understanding any discontinuity in the marketplace can help your teams focus on process, product, or perhaps business model design that can take fast advantage of the discontinuity. Support your teams by helping identify where the organizational strengths exist that will accelerate innovation.

2. Environment: Support teams with the right culture and management methodology

No innovation comes without some missteps. Otherwise, WD40 would be called WD! High performance teams are more likely to innovate when there is tolerance for mistakes. Those who don't feel safe will play it safe. But in fact, failure can often teach more than success. Teams must be pushed to learn from their mistakes, adjust quickly, and try again. Rapid cycles increase success rates. A culture of tolerance and learning is essential when combined with a deep-seated sense of urgency to bring ideas to market.

3. Organization: Seek out and connect your innovators

You may feel challenged to determine who in your organization is most likely to be an asset to a high performance team. However, there are known factors to uncover those creative enough to “think outside the box.” As you build your team, look for individuals who embody at least a few of the following traits:

Critical thinking—Creative discontent and questioning of accepted knowledge

Perspective—Interest in learning and examining problems from multiple perspectives

Risk mitigation—Interest in iteration, constantly trying and testing improvements

Access to domain expertise—Participation in richly connected social networks

Patience—Tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity

4. Resources: Take advantage of enabling technology

High performers work best when surrounded by those who complement their innovative thinking. Unfortunately, innovators often are hardest to bring together due to busy schedules and other demands. Video communication is an enabling technology that makes it exponentially easier for teams to collaborate with each other and access knowledge from elsewhere. Nearly as effective as “being there,” video communication offers the benefits that come from experiencing body language, facial expressions, and even environmental contexts such as production floors or laboratories—without the logistical challenges that come from in-person meetings. Innovative teams will aggressively gather the information and talent needed. Technology will allow ad hoc rich media communication with global colleagues as well as suppliers and customers who can contribute essential insight to the development process.

5. Process: Enable easy knowledge management

To improve performance, we must collect and access knowledge in ways that help us learn and improve. There is no right way to manage this knowledge—it is more important to focus on a method that works for your group. But consider that as record keeping on paper has already given way to online databases and tools such as wikis, video collaboration now adds an even more effective, highly-connected, visually-oriented technology to consider. Simply keep in mind that the collection and management of knowledge is paramount in fostering innovation. These teams will be generating new Intellectual Property (IP) by learning from mistakes, making new discoveries, and recombining existing solutions in new ways. Technology can make the recording of these discoveries for future use as easy as the single push of a button.

6. Integrate: Leverage the value from intellectual assets

A particular innovation may make sense for today, or it may work better in the future. The ability to capture, manage, share, and apply this knowledge promises significant value, helping teams to perform better because they are not starting from “square one.” Video collaboration, especially when recorded, is an extremely effective way to gather knowledge, capturing interaction and discussions, as well as the context and experience behind each innovative idea.

Some people believe high performance teams come together and innovate due to luck—the right people happen to be together in a room at the right time. By reviewing moments in history that resulted in some of our biggest innovations—

from the light bulb to the airplane—you will see that luck has very little to do with it. Working to create an innovative environment with high performers is possible in any environment if the proper measures are taken to make it work.

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