

# How to build a thriving, successful team



Coaching your teams in rapidly changing environments will help build your organisation's capacity to adapt and deliver.

BY IAN MITCHELL & SIAN LUMSDEN

This year", say Deloitte in their Global Human Capital Trends 2017 report, we see a shift from building organisational structures to building organisational ecosystems and networks (moving) towards agile, team centered models (and identifying) collaboration, agility and customer-centric models as the critical characteristics that will enable future organisational success".

It is "the organisation of the future arriving now", they say. And that phrase will strike a chord in boardrooms and practices everywhere. The pace of change is challenging and for your work teams, it can feel somewhere between stimulating and terrifying depending, amongst other things, on how well they are coached through the experience.

Frederic Laloux, in his groundbreaking book entitled *Reinventing Organisations*, says this: "In these confusing times some people double down on their existing perspectives and beliefs, trying to apply outdated solutions ever more frantically. Others make the leap to a new perspective that allows them to seek solutions that were previously unavailable".

Seek them, and increasingly find them. And frequently find them through a programme of team coaching interventions. Take one specific healthcare service leadership team, which recently faced the challenge of increasing patient interactions by 19,000 per annum (or 26%) to avoid incurring a substantive financial penalty. Meanwhile, the organisation's headcount was reduced by approximately 15% and the professional team down-banded on the salary scale to meet the financial restrictions that applied within the healthcare sector. The clinical management team – four relatively young, inexperienced leaders – felt overwhelmed and decided to ask for some team coaching.

"Teams", says executive coaching expert, Peter Hawkins, "are living systems, not manufactured products that can be built to order". And so it was with this healthcare team. Hawkins goes on to develop this thought further by identifying five disciplines required in a thriving, successful team – disciplines that can grow and mature as the team evolves, and which can be coached into rapid development over a relatively short

period of focused work. The first four of these disciplines, which all featured prominently during a four-session team coaching intervention carried out with our four clinical managers over a four-week period are as follows.

## 1. Commission

Commission, or ensure that the team is fully cognisant of, the organisational contract that it is required to deliver. This team had been unclear on the precise requirements of their service contracts and therefore, did not make a conscious

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commitment to deliver its requirements. Towards the middle of the first coaching session, they began to fully understand their contracted requirement and there was a discernable sense of shift in their sense of overwhelm.

## 2. Clarify

Clarify the precise goals, processes, roles and behaviours that will ensure delivery of the organisational objectives. By early in the second session, our four managers had concluded that their current processes and behaviours would not be sufficient to meet their commission. But rather than feeling overwhelmed, they were by now beginning to act purposefully and were ready to explore the next discipline.

## 3. Co-create

Co-creating comes when the team's understanding of purpose, vision and the need for forward movement move beyond words and they become a force for action that is greater than the sum of its parts. By the end of the third session, our managers had together redesigned their work processes and agreed an exciting new medium for patient interaction which, when rolled out, will achieve the required 26% uplift in output.

## 4. Connect

Connect and engage the team's critical stakeholders. Session four took the form of a presentation to a room full of directors, leaders of partner organisations, their own full service team and their direct line manager. In leading the presentation, the four managers demonstrated real belief about reaching their targets, presenting their story with confidence and enthusiasm, bringing their service team with them, and winning total buy-in from their various stakeholders.

## 5. Core learning

Discipline five is that of 'core learning', which Hawkins calls "the place where the team stands back, reflecting on their own performance and multiple processes and consolidates its learning, ready for the next cycle of engagement".

Still an ongoing internal process with our healthcare managers, this is perhaps the most important discipline in developing current self-understanding and future resilience within a healthy team – both as a unit and individually by each member.

Left to their own devices, or mentored by a senior manager, this team may well have achieved the same ends. But, they agree, not so quickly. And their organisation demanded "quickly".

"People change what they do," wrote J.P. Cotter and D.S. Cohen in *The Heart of Change*, "because they are shown a truth that influences their feelings". Effective team coaching creates a way to introduce that truth both rapidly and with scale in a way that builds organisational capacity from within. Permanently.



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