BusinessPlus+ Newsletter

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Creating an Optimal Teamwork Environment

In their book "*The Wisdom of Teams*" Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith, both partners at consulting giant McKinsey at the time, redefined what being a team is. They studied 50 different teams in more than 30 companies, from Motorola and Hewlett-Packard to Operation Desert Storm and the Girl Scouts.

From observing the successes and, just as importantly, the failures of these teams they built a model and a series of principles on how to run a high-performance team, what they deemed a 'real team', rather than a poorly performing 'pseudo team'.

According to Katzenbach and Smith a real team has to have three team basics, which are driven by elements and behaviours:

Accountability – for a small number of people where there is accountability on a mutual team basis and for each individual.
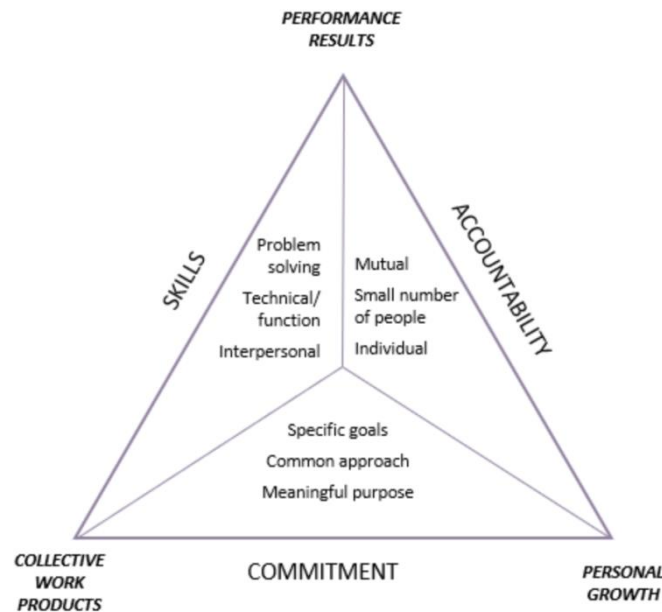
Commitment – this is driven by a meaningful and agreed purpose for the team, a common approach with specific goals to achieve the purpose.

Skills – the team needs members to cover all the technical and functional skills for the task in hand and develop problem-solving abilities alongside effective interpersonal communication.

These basics and their behaviours will help a team achieve its performance results as well as gain personal growth. They will also create what Katzenbach and Smith term 'collective work products'. These are where two or more members work on a task together, such as a specific work assignment or task, survey or experiment.

Katzenbach and Smith also identified six key factors to help teams performing optimally:

1. **Small enough in number** – keep numbers down as teams need to meet frequently and be open and interactive. If more people are needed make sub-teams.

2. **Complimentary skills** – the team should contain problem-solvers, technical skills and interpersonal abilities or learn them.

3. **Truly meaningful purpose** – high performing teams spend a lot of time working out a common purpose and it should be written down in a 'vision' or 'business case' and referred to frequently.

4. **Specific goals** – teams should develop SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-constrained) goals aligned to the purpose.

5. **Clear working approach** – the work to achieve the goals must be understood easily by all and adaptable for improvements.

6. **Sense of mutual accountability** – as well as people being clear on their roles, there should be a clear sense of team goals and that only the team succeeds or fails, not individuals.

PERFORMANCE RESULTS

SKILLS
- Problem solving
- Technical/function
- Interpersonal

ACCOUNTABILITY
- Mutual
- Small number of people
- Individual

- Specific goals
- Common approach
- Meaningful purpose

COLLECTIVE WORK PRODUCTS

COMMITMENT

PERSONAL GROWTH

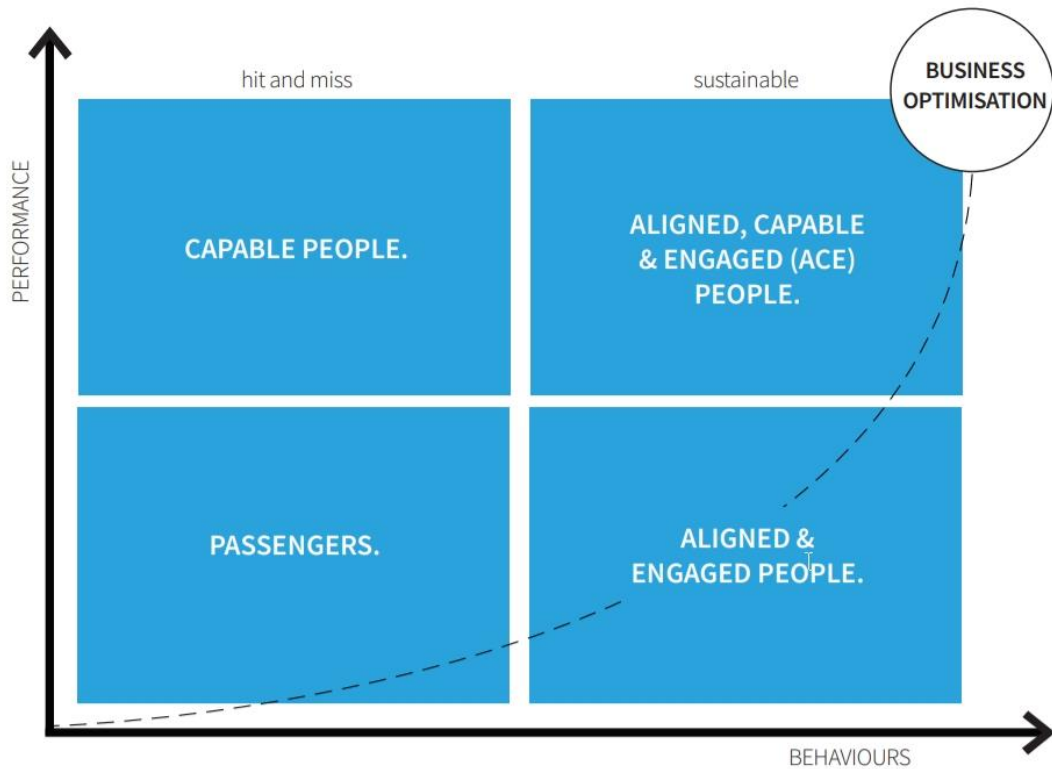*Wisdom: Katzenbach and Smith's Model of Team Basics*

In a later published the book *"The Five Dysfunctions of a Team"* - written by Patrick Lencioni, who observed that striving to create a functional, cohesive team is one of the few remaining competitive advantages available to any organisation looking for a powerful point of differentiation.

Functional teams avoid wasting time talking about the wrong issues and revisiting the same topics over and over again because of lack of buy-in. Functional teams also make higher quality decisions and accomplish more in less time and with less distraction and frustration.

THE FIVE DYSFUNCTIONS OF A TEAM

IDEAL TEAM PLAYERS...

Inattention to Results	Share accomplishments with everyone and leave their egos at the door.
Avoidance of Accountability	Hold their colleagues accountable, always strive to learn and do more and constantly look toward the next opportunity.
Lack of Commitment	Commit to team goals and do whatever is necessary to accomplish objectives.
Fear of Conflict	Do and say the right things to help teammates feel appreciated and understood, even when difficult situations arise.
Absence of Trust	Build trusting relationships by being open and accessible.

A concise summary of the book *"The Five Dysfunctions of a Team"* can be sourced from the link **HERE** and a summary diagram of Lencioni's *"The Advantage: Teamwork Model"* can be obtained **HERE**.

Ultimately the idea to become a highly agile business focused around the core purpose and values of the company. This can be achieved by having effective and appropriate behaviours and performance in the whole work team in the organisation – by moving towards the business optimisation quadrant, as shown in the diagram below.

A performance vs behaviours matrix chart showing four quadrants with BUSINESS OPTIMISATION indicated at top right. Top row labelled "hit and miss" and "sustainable". Quadrants: CAPABLE PEOPLE. (top left), ALIGNED, CAPABLE & ENGAGED (ACE) PEOPLE. (top right), PASSENGERS. (bottom left), ALIGNED & ENGAGED PEOPLE. (bottom right). Vertical axis: PERFORMANCE. Horizontal axis: BEHAVIOURS.

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