# Teaming:
# A Scientific
# Approach to High
# Performing Teams

altris

Altris believe that high performing teams are designed not built and that there is a scientific way of doing so successfully by using the science of how people think.

In this paper we will explain and introduce how you will benefit by designing high performance into your teams.

## Managing Teams is Not Easy

We have all been in teams at some point in our lives haven't we? Some will have been good experiences and some bad experiences while some have delivered what the organisation wanted, some less and some more.

We doubt that there is a single person out there who doesn't have a story to tell about teams that didn't work, or why a certain team did well. As a result of these team experiences some people relish team-work while others shy away from fully committing to working in teams and earn a reputation for not being good team players.

In the last 20 years, the received wisdom has been that teams are the way to get things done in the business world. People are put into teams, teams are redefined and restructured, memberships change but the teams are still there. Most importantly the belief that teams work is still there, despite lots of experience to the contrary.

For most of us, the belief in the 'whole being greater than the sum of the parts' still prevails. When we get to leadership roles our challenge is frequently that; to get the whole to deliver more than the sum of the parts. Teams often become our raison d'être and for some their nemesis. If you can't get a team to work you often don't go further in leadership roles.

So if teams are the way we get things done in business, yet many of us have had mixed experiences of them, does that mean there is a right or a wrong way to build a team? Are our experiences of team working dependent on the people in the team, meaning that some teams will never work and that others just naturally have the right chemistry, or is it dependent on the team leader and their ability to get the team to gel?

One look at the internet would have you believe that there is not one holy grail but thousands of them when it comes to advice about building a team. If you look harder it often appears that much of the advice is conflicting, with much based on anecdotal experience or simply a function of individual preferences and styles.

What is obvious is that the challenge of building and leading teams is of such interest to business that it is the subject of hot debate.

It would be easy to assume there is no right way. Our view is that there is a 'right' way to build excellent teams and that way draws on the way people think and uses that to design team success around good practices.

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## Is Team 'Building' the Answer?

Most of us have been through different types of team building processes, from physical activity as a team, to training in common processes, and some that assume that if we 'get on' with our colleagues we will become a team. There are team building processes that work on the basis of creating rules for the team to govern the way they interact with each other and some which focus on the formal ways that the team works together (meeting management for example)

Our view is not that these approaches are wrong or don't work; they do, to a degree. Our view is that each of these only look at the process of teaming through one dimension and by emphasising that dimension they miss the full scope of 'how people think' and what they therefore need to move from being a collection of people to a team

So if you have ever thought that 'there must be more to creating a team than this' or ' there must be something that we are missing!' then we believe that you were right.

## Why Teaming?

For years we have all been told to 'build teams' and this has led to managers having the view that they had to take the basic building blocks of teams; their people, organise them to get things done and then judge how well those people have done it. Along the way the manager will always be looking for people that perform to put into teams full of performing people, often feeling the frustration that somehow that individual performance doesn't add up when those people are 'built' into a team Our view is that the manager's job is to 'design' successful teams rather than 'build' them.

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The Altris approach takes good practice and then informs how we use it by looking at how the people in the team 'think'. We call that process 'teaming'.

## Using Thinking in Teams

Most of us have used various tools to gain insights into how people behave, particularly in recruitment processes e.g. Myers-Briggs; DISC etc. So the idea of getting the right person for the right role through some kind of insights isn't new.

But teaming isn't just about hiring one person in one job, it's about bringing together a number of people and aligning their different ways of thinking to deliver the result you are looking for.

So if it's hard to hire one person right for one role, you know the difficulty of getting four or eight or twelve together to act as one.

To get teams 'to do what we need them to do' you need a scientific method of knowing how people think and then use that thinking to make their decisions. If you can measure that for a collection of people you can harness that to create a team that delivers what you need it to. We will go on to explain that scientific method later.

You can't tell people how to think but if you can channel how they already think & match that to the team needs you are then 'designing' performance.

The way that your people think is defined by what we call 'the human meta system'. Armed with this knowledge you can significantly and scientifically increased your likelihood of designing a high performing team.

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## The High Performance Teaming Meta System

If we accept that a team starts out as a collection of people then our human meta system must also apply to what a team values and therefore collectively thinks.

The elements of our meta system can be seen as three dimensions of thought, which we simplify as Purpose, Process & People (defined scientifically as systemic, extrinsic and intrinsic).

**HPT META-SYSTEM**

| | |
|---|---|
| PURPOSE | Systemic |
| + | |
| PROCESS | Extrinsic |
| + | |
| PEOPLE | Intrinsic |
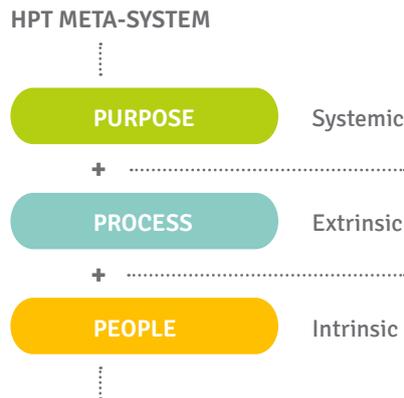
Before we just focus on what the team members think, we need to understand the factors that will support or limit their success when using that thinking in their team. There are two main influences in this; the organisational context that the team operates within (culture, industry, market conditions, degree of change etc.) and the leadership of the team (behaviour, style, attitude etc.).

Once we account for those factors we find that there are five keys to designing a high performance team:

- The Purpose of team and the strategies that they adopt to fulfill it
- The Structure, the roles and processes that the team adopt to best use their thinking in delivering the purpose
- The People in the team, their unique thinking, experiences, personalities and behavioural styles

By designing the purpose of the team, the processes that the team use to deliver that purpose and then connecting your team members in a structure that matches the kind of thinking required to deliver the purpose, you design high performance in a team. High performance means that the team delivers what you need it to, repeatedly and consistently.

**ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT**
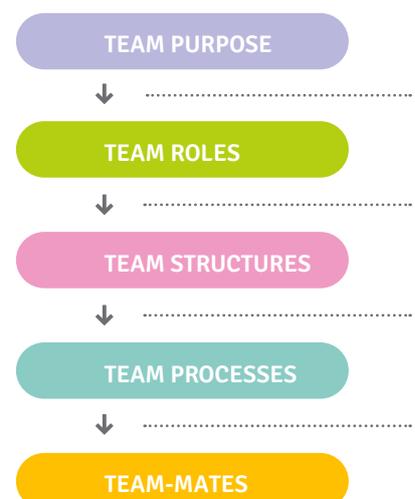
- TEAM PURPOSE
- ↓
- TEAM ROLES
- ↓
- TEAM STRUCTURES
- ↓
- TEAM PROCESSES
- ↓
- TEAM-MATES

## Why Does the Meta System Work?

Remember we said that traditional ways of building teams only look at the process of teaming through one dimension and by emphasising that dimension they miss the full scope of how people think and what they need to move from being a collection of people to a team.

If you look at the meta system from the points of view of a business and then from the employee in a business you will see why the Meta-system works:

Every successful business needs clarity of purpose. Good business looks to its strategy, its vision, its mission and its values to define and guide it. Purpose keeps the business on track to what it is there to achieve.

To achieve the purpose, the business needs clear and supportive processes. Processes are the tools and structures that a business use. Without the Purpose, the Processes will not deliver the right results and without the Processes there is no way of delivering the Purpose.

Finally the business needs People. Without the right people, there is no-one to use the processes to make decisions on the information that the processes produce, and to check that the process is meeting the purpose.

Now let's look at this from the point of view of the individual employee. If an employee is there to 'do what the organisation needs them to do, repeatedly and consistently' they need processes to help them. Following the process is how the employee delivers consistently and repeatedly. But following the process is not enough for people to make the right decisions. The employee needs to understand the purpose of the process to make those decisions (if not how can they be sure that their decisions deliver the right outcomes?).

### Purpose

- Without valuing of Purpose we have People just following a process robotically.

### Process

- Without a valuing of Process we have People doing what they think is right each time, but no consistency of output.

### People

- Without a valuing of People we need processes that can never go wrong for circumstances that never change. It is the uniqueness of human thought that produces high performance in an ever changing world.

If you apply the meta-system thinking to teams, you design the team around the common performance elements that the business requires the team to deliver and that the team members have (or in the case of building a new team; will be chosen to have).

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## The Basis for the Meta System

The meta-system is based on the Nobel Prize[1] nominated science of Axiology (the word axiology is derived from the Greek 'axios', which means worth or value and 'logos' which means theory or logic, so Axiology literally means the 'theory of value'). This science is an objective way of measuring how people make value decisions, which are therefore the underlying source of how we choose to think. The initial measurement system was created by Robert Hartman. Dr Hartman dedicated his studies to the question of 'how do we define good?' This becomes a dilemma when you realise that what may seem good to one person may not seem good to another.

Dr. Hartman's work revealed that we all value things differently, and he concluded that it's not about an absolute good, but rather a relative good (i.e. what is good to you may not be good to the next person). This understanding of relative value led to the ability to measure the mechanism of valuation in the human being. From that perspective we can quickly see the inseparable connection between what we value and how we think which of course, feeds the choices we make.

This work has been further developed by one of Hartman's original students; Wayne Carpenter. The science has now given us the unique position of being able to accurately and repeatedly measure how your people think and apply that to the designing of your teams; a process we call "teaming".

## Summary

High Performance Teams are not built, they are designed. To design high performance from teams of people, we need to understand how they think and match that thinking to the purpose of the team and the processes we need them to use to deliver that purpose.

The key to that is understanding the meta-system and how it applies to the uniqueness of your organisation and your people.

Altris offers a series of unique programmes and tools for leaders an organisations who wish to design successful teams who, as a result, deliver the outcomes that you are really looking for.

[1] Robert Hartman was nominated for a Nobel prize in 1973.

## Contact us

If you would like to know more about our teaming programmes and our approach to supporting your organisation's success then please email theteam@altris.co.nz

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