

YOUR TOP TEAM

HOT OR NOT?



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One of the keys to maximising business performance is to ensure that the Top Team work really well together.... that they are committed to achieving agreed goals and can achieve results, despite or because of individual differences in approach and perspective.

Over the last few years Aquarius Management Consultants have worked with several Top Teams in the public and private sectors to help them improve their Team Effectiveness.

Martin Gregory, a Senior Aquarius Consultant, suggests that Top Teams that deliver business results share some common features – they have:

- An urgent and worthwhile purpose
- Standards and direction
- A stable membership with some Interdependent tasks (they spend time together).
- Members chosen for skill not personality
- Members who have good self awareness and an awareness of others – people who acknowledge group moods and speak up if the group is not performing. People who can communicate their sense of what is going on in terms of content, process and people/emotion
- Norms for confrontation and caring (and they confront norms that are being broken).
- Trust, identity, efficacy (a belief that they can perform well).
- Some 'rules' of behaviour.

When we work with teams, we usually start work by exploring team member's views about the team's effectiveness and asking:

- What is good about you as a team?
- What could be better?

.....this often produces some common themes but also some startling differences!

We then go to work on increasing the team's awareness and understanding of individual differences and how they might be affecting the climate and effectiveness of the team. To do this we use a variety of tools, including the Myers Briggs inventory, to get insights on:

- How team members prefer to be energised and the settings in which they can be most productive
- What kind of information they like to pay attention to – for example facts or patterns.
- How they prefer to process information and make decisions – analytically or empathetically
- The approach they adopt to life and work – scheduled or flexible.

.....we find these processes start to highlight some of the differences (and similarities) of team member perspectives. This often illuminates the reasons for group tensions, why some tasks go well and others are difficult. Looking to the future it helps us identify the risks the team might face, working together, what will be fun and what will be difficult.

Next we discuss the norms and behaviours the team might need to exhibit, to work together well and achieve what they want. These may include behaviours like;

- Trust and candour
- Allowing open dissent
- Having fluid positions
- Taking Individual accountability

And then we examine some of the norms and behaviours they are actually exhibiting...for example;

- Talking over one another...or not talking at all.
- Not building on what has gone before
- Ignoring an individual's contribution.

In our experience, teams that achieve, demonstrate some common behaviours; they have an end product orientation and emphasise the importance of analysis. Moreover they regularly evaluate their behaviours

around contribution i.e. their feelings about:

- Quality of discussions (Candour and energy)
- Contributions to understanding and development of strategy
- Credibility of reports (degree of knowledge/insight)
- Roles' played by directors
- Constructive confrontation

To help Top Teams develop their skills and processes in these areas we encourage them to develop their own checklist to use to evaluate their performance.

A classic checklist (often used part way and at the end of board/team meetings) is illustrated below:

Checklist	Score 1 (poor) to 7 (good)
Quality of discussion	<input type="checkbox"/>
Degree of knowledge demonstrated	<input type="checkbox"/>
Degrees of constructive challenge	<input type="checkbox"/>
Participation/Energy	<input type="checkbox"/>
Recognition of group issues/Authentic Feelings	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creativity/growth	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decisions	<input type="checkbox"/>
Outputs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Satisfaction	<input type="checkbox"/>
(Min possible score 9, max 63)	Total <input type="checkbox"/>

Team members are asked to rate /score the meeting – in the example above a meeting could be score a minimum of 9 or a maximum of 63.

Teams that do this soon appreciate its value – it gives them a shorthand to talk about team effectiveness and encourages them to experiment with new behaviors.

*If you would like to know more, please contact
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EMPOWERMENT AND TEAMWORK - THE KEY TO PERFORMANCE

Chief Executive, David Currie believes strongly in the power of teamwork and has worked with Aquarius to become a world-beater in a very difficult market.

Rockware Glass the market leader in the glass container industry in Great Britain faces many challenges. There is constant pressure to drive costs down, the price of energy in this energy intensive process has doubled, there is too much competition and quality and customer service at the highest standard is a given.

Rockware's products include bottles for spirits and beer, soft drinks, milk, as well as glass containers for the food industry including many innovative designs for customers like Nestlé. Their products fill our supermarket shelves yet theirs is a brand that may be unfamiliar to consumers. They hold the coveted "preferred partner" status for the millions of bottles they make for Budweiser.

Six years ago David Currie was Manufacturing Director responsible for four factories in the U.K. He had experienced focussed teamwork in his native Australia and was convinced it was the key to success in the U.K.

With Chris Garner he set about planning and executing a series of "Performance Planning Conferences". These were 2½ day events where the management of a factory went away to a pleasant location, to take time out from the hurly burly of a 24/7/365 business to consider what was important. They plan what is to be achieved and how. You cannot stop a glass plant otherwise the molten glass solidifies in the furnace and you have an £ 10 million rebuild on your hands.

David wanted the management team of up to 20 people from each factory and this meant leaving a less senior team behind to mind the shop. He holds a major conference annually for the business and a shorter meeting (1½ days) for each plant to assess progress and produce action plans. Each plant holds quarterly reviews in-house.

The format of the conference has changed over the years, but elements have remained constant.

- Overview of the business, its market and the competition. This is always the opener and is delivered by those at the top of the business who have responsibility for each

functional area. It gives the factory management a view of their business, which was previously rarely shared with them.

- Analysis of their current situation by cross functional teams who challenge the status quo and are encouraged to ask "Why can't we.....!"
- Team building exercises with a competitive element which may be physically challenging or intellectually stimulating exercises. (David is a practical manager who does not believe in "HR games"). However, they are all fun and the teams they have built over the years are awesome.
- Setting of Key Performance Indicators. The KPI's are fairly common to the glass industry, but factories decide which are really key to their improvement and they set their own targets.
- Functional teams determine what needs to be done and individuals write action plans at the conference.
- Each individual shares with their peers what their plans are to be. At each subsequent conference individuals are encouraged to stand up and report back

Actions have been both simple and business changing. In the early days plans involved understanding familiar things with new eyes, it involved challenging the status quo and recently it has involved challenging technology and management's view of "best practice". Some plans have failed; most have been successful.

The culture of the organisation has changed and they have control of their destiny. Their parent company, Ardagh has acquired new businesses in the UK, Germany, Poland and Italy, they are market leaders and they are recognised by their customers as top suppliers. In fact, they have recently involved their customers in the conferences to "see ourselves as others see us". Another brave step in the evolution of this highly motivated company.

Chris Garner is a Director of Aquarius Management Consultants Ltd. chris.garner@aquariusconsultants.com



MEASURING CHANGE

"The flexibility of service on offer was of great assistance to meet our business requirements from the survey"

We have recently delivered a focussed telephone survey on behalf of Saint-Gobain Building Distribution (UK & Ireland). The aim of the survey was to gain a snapshot of managers' understanding and opinions of recent changes in operational business measures which would link to remuneration payments at a branch level.

In delivering this project we worked with Saint-Gobain BD to shape a short questionnaire suitable for a telephone survey. The questions were developed in such a way as to capture thoughts and views along with factual information. A cross-section sample of the nationwide Branch Managers was then contacted over a 48-hour period, enabling the immediate and undiluted responses to the questionnaire to be collated.

The survey report provided Saint-Gobain Building Distribution with a graphic and commentary based analysis of the results.

"The prompt delivery of survey results has provided us with comprehensive analysis of the understanding of the changes [in business measures and remuneration opportunity], allowing us to develop a clear agenda for further action" stated Anne Downie, Head of Reward at Saint-Gobain Building Distribution (UK & Ireland).

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Aquarius is an independent management consultancy with a core team of highly experienced consultants in business and people management. We have expertise across a wide range of business sectors and activities through many years of working with every kind of organisation, from Blue Chip companies and Government Departments to community based Primary Care Trusts.

CONSULTANCY NEWS

INSIDE OUT OR OUTSIDE IN - DELIVERING CUSTOMER SERVICE

Once you've developed your business strategy and plans, delivering outstanding business performance comes down to how effective you are at serving your customers, how efficient you are at doing it, and how well you manage the trade-offs between maximising effectiveness and efficiency

Understanding how effective you are requires taking an "outside-in" or customer view of your organisation. This means tracking what actually happens, from an initial customer contact until you ultimately meet the customer's needs, and assessing how the customer actually perceives this experience.

A different but complementary "inside-out" view can then be used to evaluate how much time, money and resource it takes to achieve the customer experience.

Finally, an "organisation" view will help clarify how you go about leading and structuring your people to support the "outside-in" and "inside-out" views and highlight how well this helps you improve performance.

Aquarius are partnering with Sequena Consulting to help our clients better understand their organisation processes and identify and implement the changes necessary to really deliver improved business performance.

Our consultants work with client teams, in interactive workshops, to capture and evaluate the current views using a powerful business process modelling tool, Engage! Analyser.

We identify improvements and future views, using the tool to evaluate them and create the business case for the associated changes.

We then work with the teams to design and implement the changes.

*If you would like to know more, please contact
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NEW BUSINESS PARTNERS

We are constantly seeking opportunities to enhance our business. In pursuit of this ambition we are pleased to announce that we have joined forces with two other companies:

- **Mott MacDonald** is a leading management, engineering and development consultancy serving the public and private sectors around the world. They are engaged across a wide range of markets; work across a full spectrum of organisations; and provide services covering all stages of business development.
- **Sequena** are business process experts providing software and services for the analysis and renewal of business processes to improve efficiency, increase productivity and enable better service delivery. They work across all market sectors and all sizes of organisations.

We will be combining our skills and expertise to offer a wider range of services and access additional markets and clients.

Public Sector: Contract Success

We are delighted to have been awarded the 'Catalist' consultancy framework agreement by the Office of Government Commerce. We are a member of the Mott MacDonald consortium, which defeated intense competition from some of the biggest and best known consultancies in the country.

The framework agreement enables Aquarius to provide consultancy advice to all sectors of government including central civil government, local government, health, police and criminal justice, defence and children's services.