

FT PUBLISHING

# When Teams Work

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How to **develop** and **lead**  
a **high-performing team**

Teams are everywhere. At work, we are part of many different teams: the department team, the sales team, the planning team, the project team. At play, we join the football team, the netball team, the swimming team, the bridge team or the dance team. Socially we support teams, watch teams and are served by teams in restaurants, hotels, shops and at events. But how much do we know about them? What makes a successful team and why do teams fail?

Developing high-performance teams and effective teamwork is a perennial issue for team leaders and team members alike. *When Teams Work* is your practical guide to achieve better teamwork and performance.

*'Full of practical and useful tips and ideas for anyone who works in, with or leads a team'*

**Siobhan McManamy**, Director of Markets, Tourism Ireland

*'A book which gives a great insight and understanding of what genuine teamwork looks like and needs. This is a book to which you will consistently return'*

**Sir Ian McGeechan OBE**, former Scottish International and British and Irish Lion; coach of several Premiership teams, coach of Scotland and head coach of the British and Irish Lions

## **Praise for *When Teams Work***

‘A comprehensive and richly resourced guide on what it takes to build a great team and how to do it. Backed by hard academic research, and brightly illuminated with memorable quotes from elite sports coaches to Michelin star chefs.’

***Doris Sew Hoy, accredited executive coach and  
author of *Trust Yourself First: Cultivating Healthy  
Relationships****

‘*When Teams Work* is a fantastic guide to every aspect of teamwork, including highly pertinent and important topics such as virtual team working and how to be truly inclusive. From addressing the bedrocks of building trust and ensuring psychological security, this book also illustrates how to resolve conflicts and increase performance. Whether you are leading, managing, building, coaching or training a team, this guide has everything covered. Highly recommended!’

***Guy Mansfield, Vice-President Finance,  
Gas Trading, Total Energies***

‘Full of practical and useful tips and ideas for anyone who works in, with or leads a team. Definitely one to add to your bookshelf.’

***Siobhan McManamy, Director of Markets,  
Tourism Ireland***

‘If you work in or lead a team, then this is a book you’ll want to read. It’s packed with tools, techniques and loads of examples. Practical, interesting and wide-ranging.’

***Dr Samantha Davies, General Practitioner and  
Clinical Director, Sarum North PCN***

requires a change of mindset and a focus on *creating* a culture rather than merely seeking to perpetuate an existing culture.

In a *Times* article, journalist Matthew Syed stated that diversity brings different identities, perspectives and insights into the tactics, which leads to better problem solving and outcomes. It's critical when teams are facing complex problems, often called wicked problems, that there are different perspectives in the team, and that they are all heard. With a wicked problem, there are no simple obvious answers to the problem – indeed there are no answers at all – only different options. As Kahneman et al. state in their book *Noise*, 'You want divergence when faced with wicked problems' (Kahneman et al., 2021). The danger is that if the team doesn't have diverse perspectives, everyone is then looking at the issue from the same narrow perspective. If that is the case, then the range of options created can be very limited.

Scott Drawer is a sports scientist who works for Team GB. He recruited a bunch of people who would challenge his thinking (Drawer, 2019).

Michelin-starred chef Tom Kerridge is a keen supporter of diversity: in an interview with us, Tom said the following:

*Kitchens are not full of people who have first class honours degrees. They are normally full of people from society, where it takes all sorts. The way I always describe a kitchen is that it is like a pirate ship: its full of loads of individuals – it's completely eclectic, it's very interesting, it's a melting pot of cultures and backgrounds. Everybody is welcome, all aiming for one thing, cooking, fun, adventure, excitement. They are amazing places to be, and because of the kind of people you attract it's an eclectic and rich mix. (Personal interview with authors, 2021)*

Rugby teams have become even more diverse with the advent of the professional game – with players from different cultures and ethnicities – and the teams are all the stronger for that diversity.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR YOU AND YOUR ORGANISATION?

The consulting firm Deloitte has carried out extensive research into diversity and the essential traits that leaders, managers and team members will need in order to deal with the need for diversity.

Deloitte's research showed that there were four mega trends in diversity.

1. **Diversity of markets.** The majority of growth in the middle-class population will come from Asia, Africa and Latin America. If organisations have global ambitions, then they will need people with a more global mindset who are more open to diversity and who are able to attract and retain local talent in these markets.
2. **Diversity of customers.** This is clearly linked to the above because as markets become more diverse then so do the customers. Really effective organisations are working hard to develop more customer-centric mindsets and capacities. Organisations' employees and teams will have to reflect the diversity of their customer base.
3. **Diversity of ideas.** Bill Gates once said that organisations must innovate or die, and innovation is among the top priorities of organisations. The best way to have effective innovation is to promote divergent thinking and to guard against the dangers of group think. This is about harnessing the collective intelligence of the organisation, which means that the organisations' leaders must listen to different points of view and actively encourage challenge.
4. **Diversity of talent.** Successful organisations will be able to develop and optimise a diverse talent pool. To look at the context – by 2030 China will have more graduates than the entire US workforce. There will be a group of highly mobile, well-educated workers and organisations will need to work hard to attract and retain the best talent. Leaders will have to adapt to the different demands of their talent. For example, according to a PWC report (PWC, 2011) millennials already comprise 50 per cent of the global workforce and they have very different expectations and attitudes.

These mega trends are the new context – the context in which we are all now operating. In order to deal effectively with these mega trends, they suggest that there are six key traits that inclusive individuals and leaders must have.

1. **Collaboration.** These are the skills of empowering others, allowing other people's voices to be heard and the ability to create an effective team.
2. **Cultural intelligence.** This is primarily about knowledge of other cultures and preferences and an individual's level of adaptability.
3. **Curiosity.** This is about the degree of openness, ability to take different perspectives and to cope with ambiguity.

4. **Cognisance.** (Awareness) This is a person's degree of self-awareness about their own biases, their ability to control and regulate emotions and how fair they are when dealing with others.
5. **Courage.** This is about showing humility and bravery. Having the courage to challenge entrenched attitudes about diversity and calling out discrimination when you see it. We see this as an especially important trait. If you tolerate casual discrimination, then it becomes the accepted way of doing things. If as a leader, you do not call out and challenge any form of discrimination, then it's highly unlikely that other people will.
6. **Commitment.** This is about sticking with the process of becoming more diverse – which is not always an easy one – and having a strong belief that it is the right thing to do.

## REFLECTION

Thinking about these traits, how would you assess yourself and how could you improve in each trait? Use the chart below to note down how you rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being low and 5 being high. Note down initial ideas on how you can improve.

Trait	Self-rating	Notes on how to improve
Collaboration		
Cultural intelligence		
Curiosity		
Cognisance		
Courage		
Commitment		

Once you have rated yourself and noted down any ideas, you might like to begin prioritising the areas that are the most important in your current context, and how you might start taking specific actions.

Finally, Hunt et al.'s report *Diversity Matters* tells us that companies rated in the top quartile for diversity financially outperform those on the bottom quartile (Hunt et al., 2015). They also attract and retain top talent and have better customer orientation.

As well as looking at diversity from the perspective of gender, race, age, sexual preference and so on, we can also look at it from the perspective of

cognitive diversity. Cognitive diversity is defined as differences in perspective or information processing styles. It is not predicted by factors such as gender, ethnicity or age.

Research by our colleagues Alison Reynolds and Dave Lewis (2017) found that a high degree of cognitive diversity could generate accelerated learning and performance in the face of new, uncertain and complex situations. So the lesson is to also look for cognitive diversity as well as other forms of diversity.

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Here are a few tips on how to increase Diversity and Inclusion within your team.

- The main focus should be in **bringing more diversity** into the team and on **recognising the diversity** that already exists in the team. Take stock of the existing levels of diversity in your team. For instance: people from ethnic minorities make up approximately 13 per cent of the UK population. So, you should be aiming for at least that level of representation on your team. Women make up more than half of the UK population, so you may like to consider whether you should examine the gender balance in your team.
- Be sure you are being **fully inclusive** of all the diversity in the team. Examine any biases that may be present and work hard to allow everyone to express their opinions fully.
- Think about **creating employee networks** in the organisation in order to support diversity. For example, consulting company Lane 4 have several employee networks or forums where people can discuss, share issues, become more aware and educate themselves about various issues connected to Diversity and Inclusion. There is:
  - Mind 4 – for mental health support
  - Black Lives Matter – a network for black and ethnic minority employees
  - Thrive – which is a network for women (but which is open to men).

International construction firm Mace have employee networks such as Women at Mace, Pride at Mace, Parents at Mace, Ethnic Diversity and Inclusion, Enabled at Mace and Mace Military. These networks all create awareness, knowledge and education within the organisation and of

course within their teams. But it is essential that top leadership support and encourage these networks.

- **Examine your recruitment practices.** Think of how you word your job advertisements and where you place them. Could the job descriptions be more inclusive? Could you proactively recruit among under-represented populations?
- **Have clear rules of conduct and behaviour.** Ensure these are respected.
- **Stamp out any discriminatory words and actions.** Don't allow casual discriminatory remarks – insist that team members are respectful of diversity. This is the responsibility of all the team members not just the team boss. The recent case of cricketer Azeem Rafiq illustrates what can happen if you allow a culture of casual racism to exist. Rafiq filed a legal complaint against Yorkshire Cricket Club claiming direct discrimination and harassment on the grounds of race. The 29-year-old, who played professionally for Yorkshire in two spells between 2008 and 2018, also claimed victimisation and detriment as a result of his efforts to address racism at the club. Some of the players that Rafiq accused of racism said that it was simply friendly 'banter'. But clearly telling someone to go back where they came from, or referring to them as 'you lot', is not friendly banter – it is racism pure and simple, and its effect on Rafiq was extremely negative. This kind of language needs to be taken out of a team's culture, and the responsibility lies not just with the top management but with every single player. Don't accept this kind of behaviour in the team – speak up and let it be known that it is unacceptable. Of course this takes courage, but how can you have an effective team if some members are being harassed and are victims because of their race, colour, gender or sexual preference?

In an interview Rafiq said, 'I want to see kids starting off their journey in cricket in a culture of acceptance and respect, where they are judged on their talent and not on their culture and identity. I hope that the investigation will result in meaningful change at the club and in the sport'.

- **'Know' before you 'do'.** This means taking the time to find out what is happening. Explore people's issues and concerns before you start taking action. Build the actions on what is really happening in the team rather than as a tick box exercise.

The importance of acting effectively in increasing diversity, equality and inclusion in the workforce was recently illustrated by an internal report into the Bank of England's approach to Diversity and Inclusion. It stated that staff from ethnic minority backgrounds were less likely to be promoted, earned less and were more likely to feel they were being treated unfairly than their white colleagues. One of the report's recommendations was that senior managers should be held accountable through their pay packets for meeting inclusion targets. The Governor (the equivalent of the CEO) of the Bank stated that a truly diverse and inclusive bank was 'mission critical' for the organisation. We wonder how many other CEOs would have the same feeling.