

Team Effectiveness

The role of psychological tools

Encouraging effective team working sometimes seems a bit like riding a roller coaster. Just as you think you have got it nailed it races downhill again. And you've probably noticed, it positively hurtles downhill but chugs slowly back up hill. This is in part due to the multifactorial nature of team performance with a myriad of factors involved in the final result. We'd like to explore one aspect of team development – that of the role and use of psychological tools.

Perspectives on team performance

Team dynamics are complex. When performance ebbs, it is often possible to identify distinct causes, such as Jim doesn't really like Bob and so they avoid each other and work ineffectively together, also leading to the 'Jim crowd' and the 'Bob crowd' or unwanted separation/ factions within a singular team. This factor identification is paramount to resolving team issues but sadly is not helpful in establishing a baseline of high quality teamwork. It is a bit like the patient with a problem but no outward symptoms. You don't even know you need to go and fix something.

You could be forgiven for pointing out that team performance would start to suffer if all wasn't right. True enough. But most teams perform well below their true potential; it's just that we don't know it! It's not until you get a team into a high performance state do you really realise how 'ordinary' performance actually was. The answer is to systematically improve performance by addressing factors known to contribute and for that we need a model.

10 facets of team effectiveness

As part of developing an effective approach to improving team performance, an examination of the literature, coupled to experience, elicited 10 key areas that high performance teams focus on to ensure they remain high performance. This framework is known as Medicology's 10 Facets of Team Effectiveness (see figure 1).

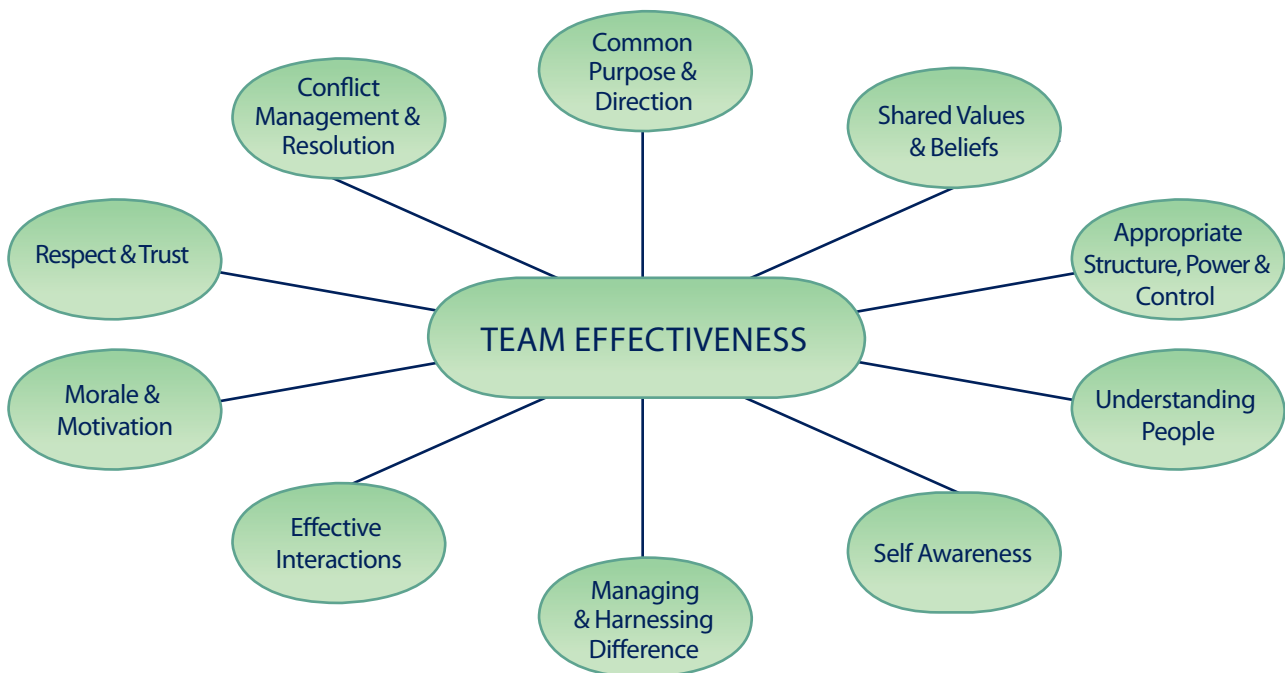
Although overlapping and interacting, each stands alone in its influence or impact on performance. The framework can be used to develop more effective team development programmes and forms the basis of the Medicology approach to team development. What we'd like to discuss is the use of psychological tools in this process, including

both the benefits and pitfalls, as well as the limitations.

What do we mean by 'psychological tools'? The type of psychological tool that we refer to is one that helps an individual make sense of or interpret behaviour, behaviour being the outward 'symptom' of the fuzzy inner wiring. Many healthcare professionals will come across a plethora of these tools during their career but the more common ones are:

- MBTI® - Myers Briggs Type Indicator
- SDI® - Strength Deployment Inventory
- FIRO-B® - Fundamental Interpersonal Relations Orientation

In healthcare, the commonest one is MBTI, which examines a series of dimensions, for instance 'introvert-extrovert', known as preferences and which give rise to behavioural trends. The tool helps someone with a preference for extroversion understand and interpret the behaviour of someone with introversion as their preference. FIRO-B looks at certain types of behaviour and how much a person desires or gives off under certain distinct circumstances. SDI attempts to examine the underlying motivation for patterns of



10 Facets of Team Effectiveness

Figure .1



behaviour, enabling people to adapt their approaches and predict responses. All of these tools have inherent weaknesses, not least of which is that only a proportion of participants like being 'analysed'.

Where do they play a role?

Using the 10 facets model, we can examine the sorts of scenarios where use of a psychological tool may be useful. That doesn't mean it should be used and the decision to use is not something that should be taken lightly. We approached the examination by considering what use a tool might be and consequently, whether it would be valuable, assessed simply as vital, valuable, neutral and low.

What becomes clear is that psychological tools play an important or even vital role in team development, even allowing for our earlier words of caution.

The cause for caution

Psychological tools can have a number of detrimental effects when not used appropriately. The commonest ones are:

- Frustration – if they are too difficult to use practically, then they hold little value
- Isolation – outliers can start to feel like outsiders if not handled appropriately
- Generalisation – people get assigned to a box that they may or may not be happy with, resulting in disengagement

We find that some tools that are robust at a research/ validity level are less practical in everyday reality. Without sufficient attention paid to embedding the understanding and application, they become 'interesting' but not useful. In our book that is also called 'wasteful'. Conversely, sometimes the more simple tools can provide immense benefit despite their simplistic approach. We have to remember that without the benefit of these insights our approach to our teams is somewhat unobjective. In actual fact we tend to approach all team members in a manner that works well for us, which is a direct expression of our own underlying wiring, and so even subtle changes in the direction of others can produce measurable improvements in team effectiveness. Overall we like them, we just urge organisations to make an intelligent

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Facet	Value	Use
Common purpose & direction	Low	Differing psychology plays some role in the acceptability of a chosen direction
Shared values & beliefs	Valuable	Our underlying wiring gives rise to many values and beliefs, so tools can help develop a picture that is useful in both managing differences and reaching consensus
Appropriate structure, power & control	Valuable	Approaches to leadership e.g. transformational versus transactional, are fundamentally influenced by our wiring. Understanding this helps develop a team structure consistent with the team members
Understanding people	Vital	People are far more similar on the outside than within. Without an appropriate framework, it is almost impossible to truly understand people and what makes them tick. Even with it's difficult!
Self awareness	Vital	One of the most valuable aspects of these tools is how they help an individual understand their own behaviour, which is a precursor to developing behavioural flexibility, essential in teams.
Managing & harnessing difference	Valuable	Difference occurs at many levels, from our underlying wiring to the skills we hold. Whereas tools provide little insight into skills, they elicit useful information around structuring the work by helping you identify who might get the most out of it and what's important to them.
Effective interactions	Vital	An interaction between two people results in an emotional response and psychological tools help us not only understand that but also to predict it and adapt so as to create positive, unambiguous interactions.
Morale & motivation	Valuable	Our morale and motivation is linked to our underlying psychology interacting with external stimuli. BY understanding that, we can ensure team members remain motivated, with good morale.
Respect & trust	Vital	Whereas most can subscribe to the need for respect, few realise just how much it is influenced by our behavioural drivers. It is differences in wiring which often cause degradation in respect between individuals.
Conflict management & resolution	Vital	When team members fight, actively or passively, the cause and the solution is most often found in their wiring. The tools also provide a neutral basis on which to explore and resolve differences.