



what makes an effective, high-performing team?

High-performing teams share seven common characteristics.

Team members: **are visibly diverse; curious about others** and thereby uncover invisible aspects of diversity (cognitive, personality, experience); **share and open up with each other; are honest in their feedback; engage in fun and playfulness; peer-coach for mutual growth; and display awareness and emotional intelligence** (of growing importance in an age of machine learning and unprecedented pace of change).

Visible Diversity

Seeing diversity (age, ethnic background, gender, etc) in teams is critical. It is a strong signal to team members and the outside world that divergent thinking is welcome, and that inclusion and care are valued.

Invisible Diversity

Members of high-performing teams are curious about each other. They ask questions that help them learn about the preferences and identities of their teammates – talents, hobbies, fears, personality traits and quirks,

past experiences, life philosophy, values, principles, etc. This is not only valuable in terms of strengthening the bonds, but also allows teams to leverage this diversity of thought, and 'connect the dots' on projects and collective tasks.

Psychological Safety

High-performing teams create a culture of sharing and opening up to each other, which results in a feeling of being safe and supported by the team. The indirect effect is more courage on the part of teammates to experiment and innovate at the risk of making a mistake. After an extensive research on Project Aristotle exploring 180 teams, Google learned that their best teams had a high degree of psychological safety. Today, this is part of the company's core values – not only because of its 'feel good' factor, but because it has an impact on team innovation and performance.

Feedback

One of the greatest challenges in providing others with feedback is that it often feels unsolicited – the recipient hasn't really asked for it, and the consequence is twofold:

- A. we feel uncomfortable sharing it
- B. the recipient is defensive.

High-performing teams have routines in place about debriefing common

1. SEE Visible Diversity
2. ASK Invisible Diversity
3. SHARE Psychol Safety
4. BE HONEST Feedback
5. PLAY Fun and Creativity
6. GROW Empower and Coach
7. WOW EI in times of AI

experiences and giving each other feedback. They learn to be honest with each other and improve feedback-giving skills over time.

Playfulness

Most teams today still equate 'being professional' with 'being serious'. Instead, high-performance teams engage in fun, play, and even silliness such as practical jokes. Emphasising the importance of fun in language (project names, room names, job titles) is key part of building a fun and engaging team culture. Who wouldn't want to be a "Chief troublemaker"?

Peer-coaching

Beyond the idea of feedback, lies a critical skill of peer-coaching. Instead of pushing through advice, teammates on high-performing teams pull insights through asking questions. They understand the value of asking "Why did you do..." instead of "Why don't you do..."

Emotional Intelligence

Fast-paced change in the organisation and environment increasingly produces negative emotions at the workplace (anxiety, stress, fear, frustration), which requires more effective EI competences on the part of leaders today. High-performance teams know that emotion-work is just as important a part of their performance as succeeding at the task itself. They continuously improve their skills of reading, understanding, and regulating negative emotions.



Professor Ina Toegel was Chair of CRF's 10th International Conference in Lisbon, earlier this year. Highlights from the event can be read in the conference retrospective available [here](#).

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