

## High-Performing Teams in the Post-COVID Workplace

JUNE 7, 2021 | ARTICLES



In imagining the post-COVID workplace, it's critical to sustain the positive changes that have taken place during the pandemic. Returning to the old normal is not an option for strong companies in 2022 and beyond. In a 5/20 McKinsey webinar, "Reimagining Organizations for Post-Pandemic times," Mary Meaney suggests business leaders contemplate: "Who are you? How do you operate? and How will you grow?" Effective operations remove boundaries, accelerate decision making, and adapt new technologies. Meaney concludes, "Amid the crisis, leaders are learning that high-performing teams make not just faster but also better decisions."

### What Makes a Top Performing Team?

A high-performance team is a group of people who demonstrate high levels of collaboration and deliver superior results. This team is usually comprised of people with different but complementary roles and responsibilities, working in sync like gears in a machine. While teams are obviously a workplace staple, achieving high performance requires planning and investment.

It may feel simpler for a manager to delegate tasks to individuals, gather their output, and control the decision-making. Yet, high-performance work teams outperform individuals because they have the advantage of a multitude of experiences and skills and they are more nimble in problem-solving. High-performance teams are empowered to set strategy and execute, often with limited oversight. All top performing teams have:

- Common purpose and shared values
- Well-defined goals, roles, and responsibilities
- Rotating and participative leadership
- Transparency, communication, and trust
- Professional development and incentives

### How to Build High-Performance Teams

#### *Identify Your Talented People*

Identify the talented people with the relevant and diverse functional expertise, experience, and skills who will comprise the team. Then, evaluate individuals' working styles using Myers-Briggs type assessments, to understand how they will learn, collaborate, and lead together – whether in person or virtually. Team members will inspire and encourage each other – leveraging and accelerating each other's contributions for cumulative success.

#### *Build a Shared Sense of Purpose and Goals*

Bring the team together, in person or virtually, to discuss the company mission, team purpose, and project priorities. Articulate the objectives and encourage team participation; welcome debate and discourse where necessary as the means to secure individual and group buy-in. Develop team SMART goals (specific, measurable, actionable, results oriented and time bound) and include stretch goals that motivate performance. Align team goals with individual goals and company business objectives.

#### *Invest in Streamlined Communication and Team Growth*

High-performing teams must be flexible while working in sync. They need clear processes and accessible tools to communicate freely and quickly. Clear communication has never been more important as more people are working virtually. From Slack to Monday.com, assess the tools with the team that will be using them. Build the team by providing professional development opportunities that inspire them to continue to create and innovate.

#### *Focus on Culture and Introduce Rituals*

High-performance demands a culture of excellence. To achieve that state, especially during the pandemic, many successful leaders turned to company culture and rituals to support their teams. At IBM, Arvind Krishna, CEO doubled down on their culture of inclusion with a "Work from Home Pledge" encouraging employees to help each other in maintaining work/life balance.

#### *Be an Authentic Leader*

High-performance teams are driven by strong leaders. According to IMSA Search Global Partners' Mauritius Managing Partner Thierry Goder, "Great leaders are aware of their leadership style and its effect on their teammates. They reflect often, clarifying and deepening their personal vision, focusing their energies, and developing patience. Throughout, they lead with authenticity – drawing from their own experiences, values, and strengths." He adds, "Great leaders act as catalysts, inspiring others. We draw inspiration from the wisdom of the Ancient Toltec people as described in the book *The Four Agreements* by don Miguel Ruiz:

- Agreement 1: Be Impeccable with Your Word
- Agreement 2: Don't Take Anything Personally
- Agreement 3: Don't Make Assumptions
- Agreement 4: Always Do Your Best"

As companies plan for the post-COVID workplace, they will be assessing leadership and reevaluating strategic goals. They will be thinking about how to build more high-performance teams – looking at their talent pool, ensuring a shared sense of purpose, transparent and effective communication, and strengthening culture. Most importantly, they will be reflecting on the performance of their leadership teams, evaluating their ability to drive success through the crisis and beyond.