

Brief

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The latest research, thinking
& news on growth pace and delivery
from around the world

Teams aren't what they used to be

We need them to be more female, flexible, fluid, open and outward-facing. Teams are more important than they ever were, and are changing fast. Leaders and HR teams are having to tear up the textbook and look at them, and invest in them, in new ways.

We all know that teamwork is good – and the more senior the team, the greater the potential impact (positive or negative) on the organisation. In today's unpredictable, turbulent times, teams can become even more useful and important: they operate in more fluid, complex ways, manage ambiguity better and can use their diversity to reduce the danger of old habits and assumptions. Teams are the perfect place to start as role-models for collaboration. We looked at recent research to find the key themes for action.

- 1. Old assumptions about teams are crumbling –they are less static and continue changing:** Teams used to sit within the structural hierarchy, be stable over time, included people mainly assigned to that team, shared common and stable goals, performed in well-defined roles, based in one location. Now, more teams cross organisational boundaries, change and adapt their members, roles and goals, are dispersed (are often virtual) and may operate more as a community of interest. In particular they more often have:
 - *Tougher, more fluid and less defined challenges to meet* – they can be set up at short notice to meet new goals and opportunities, when there is often no time for rigorously defined remits
 - *Dynamic composition* - membership is based on changing availability and priorities, may well include people of different 'grades', experience and background – each with different pressures on them
 - *Technology and distance to manage* - the ability to work virtually creates enormous potential for new team structures as well as big challenges arising from 24/7 cross-cultural working
- 2. The more women in a team, the smarter it is?** A team only adds value if its collective intelligence is greater, and applied better, than that of individual members. One recent study shows that groups of women are collectively smarter than groups of men – the result of hormones, emotional intelligence and social factors. Team diversity is ethically right – we now know it is also much better for performance.
- 3. Team training and capability may now be more important than individual:** the faster, more fluid and flexible we require teams to be, the more important it is for everyone to have teamwork skills and a collaborative culture – and this should be core when recruiting and developing talent.
- 4. Individual development may now be best delivered peer-to-peer by cross-training in a team:** With pressure on time and resources, and a wider range of flexible and available teams, this is now a core way to develop individual talent.
- 5. 'Team-building' works best when focused around the real work:** the more diverse the team, its members and their roles, and their locations, the more 'team-building' is needed. At the heart of this is ensuring a shared mental model of their purpose, their way of working, and their approach to decisions – all based around the practicalities they face.
- 6. Fast, fluid, flexible teams thrive in organisations with open, collaborative, cultures of self-governing accountability:** when managers are members of several teams (virtual or otherwise) whose membership changes, the old ways of command and control accountability don't work. Trust, transparency and collaborative mindset become key – built on clear team purpose.
- 7. The ultimate power of a team is not just what it achieves within the team, but how well it connects with the rest of the world – internally and externally:** the textbook focus for high-performing teams was based on strength of relationship, and behaviour 'in the room'. Today, the data shows that high performance mainly comes from how much the team networks, learns and influences others, internally and externally.