10 min.

10-minute books

How to improve your team's performance

3 – Team development skills

High-performing teams are constantly thinking about how to improve

Can you imagine a sports team that only thinks once a year about how to improve and how to develop its players individually instead of doing it after every game or training session? Hand on heart, when was the last time you did it with your own team? Yet only teams that regularly reflect on their performance and develop the abilities of each member become truly excellent.

If you ask your employees what the success factors of a high performing team in which they participated were, they will certainly answer that one of these factors was "technical skills and complementarity "[1]. The skills of developing a team and its members are rarely mentioned, although they are essential. This shows how much what is taken for granted in sport is completely obliterated in business.

Or almost! In agile organisations, teams are forced to think in a structured way about how to improve, usually at least once a month. This is called retrospectives, an approach that I will describe in more detail later.

This book does not focus on the technical skills, specific to each mission, but on the social skills needed to develop a successful team. These are among others:

- Continuous reflection on the effectiveness of teamwork and the development of good practices
- A strong culture of feedback and peer coaching
- Constructive problem and conflict management
- Interpersonal and communication skills of team members
- Effective decision-making methods

In the following pages I present some particularly effective approaches to team development.

1) See the 10-minute book « Team success factors»

Continuously improving the effectiveness of teamwork: The "retrospective" tool

"A permanent reflection is good for sports teams but impractical in business", you may think?

This is not what companies that have introduced agile practices believe: they require their teams to think about how to improve at least every four weeks, sometimes even more often. One to two hours invested every month in continuous improvement and the implementation of good practices that always pay off.

Retrospectives: Short learning cycles with little investment and a high level of responsiveness

The basic concept of a retrospective is derived from a principle of the Agile Manifesto: "At regular intervals, the team thinks about how to become more efficient, then agrees and adjusts its behaviour accordingly". It is therefore not a review for learning lessons at the end of a project, but a continuous improvement approach. Meetings should be held at very regular intervals. For conventional teams, at least every four or six weeks. The idea is that it is necessary to stop frequently for self-evaluation - investing little time each time - and to have short learning cycles. If the proposed changes do not work, they are quickly corrected in the next cycle.

Starfish retrospective, an easy and effective format for retrospectives

There are many formats for retrospectives that are used depending on the context and challenges of the team. One of the simplest and most effective is the "Starfish" format.

1. *The Past*

   − Team members write on green post-it® the positive elements of teamwork since the last retrospective. The post-it® are read and grouped together on the star. It is very important to start with the positive elements alone, as this helps to develop an open and constructive atmosphere.

− The team members then write on pink Post-it® the elements that did not work well or should be improved

Only the two or three most promising ideas are implemented!
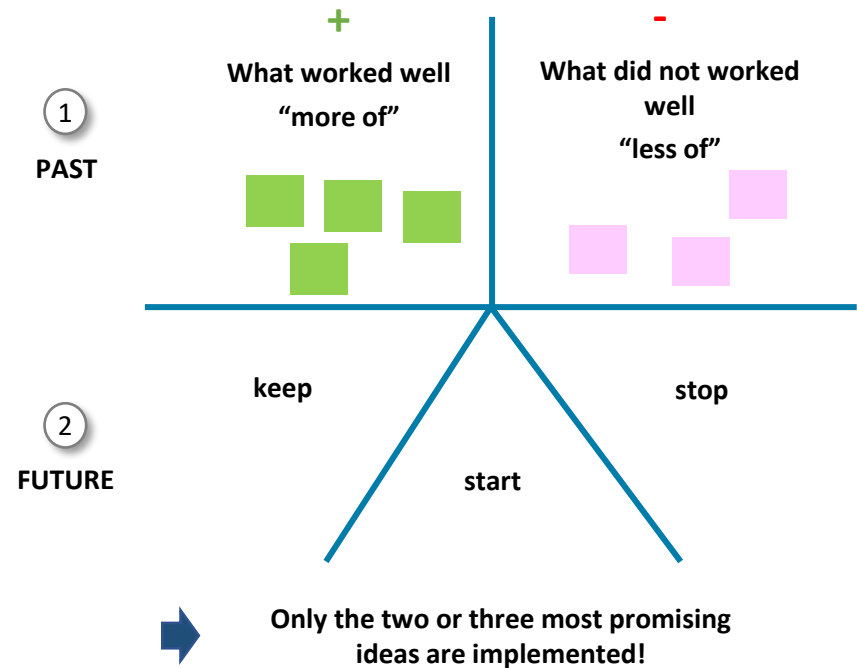
2. *The future*

   The Team members then reflect on how to improve the work in the future.

   − What you must absolutely keep (usually the green Post-it®, it goes very fast)
   − What to stop doing, the practices that have not proved their worth
   − What we should start doing, new practices that will enable the team to perform even better

   Only the two or three most promising ideas are implemented, which optimises the effort-improvement ratio

Don't hesitate and embark on a cycle of at least three retrospectives. You'll see, trying it is adopting it!

Developing problem-solving skills

There is no better way to bond a team than to have them solve problems together!

One proven approach to problem solving is the A3 method, so called because the entire discussion and its results can be written down on an A3 sheet. This allows you to focus on the essential points.

An A3 template - which I have simplified - is composed of a sequence of six elements:

1	**Background**	Description of the problem and its effects in relation to the achievement of a business objective.
2	**Current situation**	Description of the current state, containing detailed facts, often in the form of easily understandable graphic elements.
3	**Goals**	The goals you want to achieve – if possible quantified -, the specific changes you want to create.
4	**Root causes analysis**	This analysis is crucial. The objective is to identify the factors influencing the problem as well as the root causes. A good method is to ask the question "why?" five times in a row in order to always go deeper into the search for causes.
5	**Options and measures**	It is important in this phase to develop and consider several options and not stop at the first idea, for example by brainstorming. Description of the measures (how?) that will solve the problem.
6	**Action plan and follow-up**	Creation of an action plan (what? who? by when?) Follow-up: How will the implementation and the impact of the measures be monitored? How will the measures be sustained?

A3s are deceptively simple: The most important thing is the underlying thinking. It allows

- to focus on joint problem solving by encouraging constructive and productive dialogue
- the team members to work in a structured way, based on root causes analysis
- to communicate in a different, caring way, to be more actively involved, to adopt a collective point of view and to learn from each other

If you do this regularly and the team emerges victorious from these challenges, it creates a positive problem-solving culture, develops a "solution-oriented" attitude and increases trust among members. The team becomes united and efficient.

It is not just a problem-solving approach, but also a very effective method of team development!

Making sure everyone speaks out: The 0-100 scale

It is common for some people to be more reserved in a team and to express themselves only rarely. It is always possible for you as a manager to explicitly ask for their opinion. One method that ensures participation and greater interactivity is the 0-100 scale.

Put five papers on the floor, marked 0-25-50-75-100 and arranged on a line that serves as a scale. Ask all team members to physically position themselves on this scale to answer the question asked. For example,

- How well does the team work together?
- How well does the team work with the sales department?
- What is the chance of success in implementing this measure?

Each person explains - still standing in their place - why they have positioned themselves this way. The answers allow a better understanding of the reflections, perceptions or motivations of each member and enrich the discussions.

Two skills are essential for successful teams, but require prior training of members:

Preventing and managing conflicts

Conflicts are inevitable in a team that is really trying to achieve ambitious goals. I have already described in a 10-minute book the "speed dating" exercise[2], a routine that defuses the frustrations that build up in a working relationship.

There are other methods to prevent conflict. One of the most effective is to train teams in interpersonal relationships, for example by introducing members to different personality types and their influence on communication and collaboration. There are many approaches (e.g. the "big 5", DISC, ...) which have all their advantages and disadvantages. If they are well presented and well used, they can increase team performance and reduce conflict.

A culture of feedback and frequent positive feedback

All people working in teams should have received feedback training, especially on how to properly give corrective/constructive feedback to change inappropriate behaviour. A genuine feedback culture is a hallmark of successful teams.

A secret of team development is to give positive feedback on a very regular basis that reinforces the desired behaviours. It is important to use the same feedback rules: Concrete situation, observed facts, positive consequences and behaviour to be reinforced, and not just a simple "well done!"

Unfortunately, managers use much more often corrective rather than positive feedback. However, experiments with teams of young football players who received only corrective or only positive feedback have shown that the latter increased their performance much more!

Of course, it is not about giving only positive feedback, it's about giving more than just corrective ones. A good measure is three to one.

This approach is proven to increase team motivation, commitment and motivation ... and its performance.

Good luck with the development of your team!

2) See the 10-minute book « Relationships in team and psychological safety»

Contact

Do you still have questions? Teams to develop? A transformation to manage? Do not hesitate to contact me.

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