

# Executive Team Development

Creating a Stronger *More* Effective Senior Team

**TALENT**  
INSTITUTE

## The Context

The CEO is the lynchpin between the demands of the Board and organizational execution. The senior team is the most potent source of leverage the CEO has to ensure strategic alignment and execution excellence.

The senior team's purpose, structure and membership should be determined based on what the CEO needs to achieve considering his or her style, the goals of the business, and the demands of the operating landscape.

Ironically, CEOs spend far less time, energy and rigour in managing their teams versus managing other key stakeholders (e.g. Boards). Lack of rigorous and intentional senior team leadership risks strategic misalignment and derailed execution of company goals.

The situation is compounded by the intense pressures executive leaders operate under. This can lead to counter-productive behaviours—turf battles, ego conflicts, and a lack of alignment. Those behaviours can become threats to executive team performance that cascade through the entire organization, potentially crippling it.

However, when senior teams are at their best and most powerful, the positive effects of leading with collective focus and collaboration are felt across an organization and seen in business results.

## Leadership Challenges

The Executive Team may face a wide range of challenges related to increasing the organization's performance.

These challenges include:

- Dealing with growing uncertainty
- Making a strategic organizational shift
- Building alignment in a fragmented organization
- Increasing the ability to have constructive conflict
- Driving a culture shift
- Responding effectively to disruptive change.

*The dynamics within the team are radically disturbed when a new leader is appointed, or when new members join.*

**“The first step to greatness is not a winning strategy, but an effective CEO and top team.”**

# Things We Know About Teams

The ability of the executive leadership team to work together effectively to drive change and execute strategy across the business is a critical element in the organization's success.

- A cohesive, well-functioning top team is the only strategic advantage that cannot be copied or replicated.
- Great executive teams keep up their performance by investing in a routine of reflection, learning and action that becomes their way of leading.
- Conflict is routinely avoided in teams and over time this creates misunderstandings, blame and resentment. Work gets done, but with less ease and cooperation.
- Team dynamics often get stuck. Team members have problems moving beyond ineffective behavioural patterns, can feel burnt out and stop focusing on the evolution of the team.
- Struggling teams can become successful. However, it takes time, hard work and, most importantly, the leader's and the team's full commitment.
- Great teams can reach past 'good' results and get to 'great' results. They 'hit the numbers' consistently and share a mutual satisfaction from doing it. However, moving from 'good to great' requires discipline, commitment and continuous introspection (How are we doing? What are the stumbling blocks? How can we improve?).
- Most teams benefit from the support of a facilitator who understands the business context, as well as the team dynamics, maintains objectivity, and ensures that any 'elephants in the room' are identified and tackled.

## Towards Increased Effectiveness

Many issues can limit team effectiveness, including a lack of trust, the inability to creatively respond to interpersonal conflict, a disregard for accountability, and failure to maintain focus on the most critical opportunities for success.

Saying you are a great team is one thing, but having your customers, business partners and shareholders say that, is another. Demonstrating high-performance work team behaviours is what matters.

Achieving a greater level of team effectiveness and team high-performance is a journey.

Research has shown that the most effective teams, focusing initially on working together, get early results in their efforts to deal with important business issues, and then reflect together on the way they did so, thus discovering how to function as a team. Top teams address business performance issues directly, but behavioural issues only indirectly and after the event.

To become a top team requires continuous hard work. It calls for effective action, reflection and cohesion. The action element of the cycle improves the direction of the organization and its ability to renew itself, while reflection makes it possible for the team to discover ways of improving its interaction.

## Results That Matter

High-performing executive teams:

- Collectively drive organizational outcomes for success
- Work together as 'one team'
- Model collaboration and collective leadership across the organization
- Exhibit increased levels of trust, camaraderie, and cohesion
- Have a clear common understanding of their individual roles and responsibilities at the functional and enterprise levels
- Are more aware of behavioural predispositions and their impact on the team's dynamics
- Improve collaboration across all organizational boundaries
- Shift their ability and approach to drive real and meaningful change.

## Objectives of an Intervention

The objectives include:

- To leverage 'teaming' as a vehicle for change
- To critically examine the success factors required for high-performance
- To improve team effectiveness through individual awareness, involvement, skill development, behavioural change and a greater commitment to collaboration
- To understand how teams function and the elements of successful versus dysfunctional teams
- To reflect on the challenges facing the team
- To identify the strengths and development areas of the team
- To discuss and agree processes and actions to achieve accelerated growth and development.

## Outcomes of the Journey

The outcomes usually include the following:

- Shared understanding of the current state and a clear definition of a desired future state
- Members are aware of collective strengths, as well as potential pitfalls
- Team members capitalise on the richness of diversity within the group
- Leaders are self-aware and interested in personal and professional growth. They inspire and energise the people who work with and for them. They seek more development and self-awareness – and encourage it in others.
- Conflict is dealt with effectively – team members have the attitude and skills required to have difficult conversations without blame. As a result, resentment does not build up over time and different perspectives become a source of inspiration rather than contention.
- There is clarity and consistency in the way decisions are made. The decision-making process consciously includes multiple perspectives and goes beyond personal idiosyncrasies and the use of power to push pet options.
- The team continually asks itself and discusses tough questions about its interpersonal dynamics, effectiveness, level of joy, creativity and evolution.
- Members come alive and co-create extraordinary work results.

## Progress Measurement

The team will select the metrics whereby it will judge its progress.

Performance metrics include:

- Accelerated results
- Improved meeting flow
- Increased collaboration
- Faster decision-making
- Enhanced feedback processes.

## The Talent Institute-Approach

We believe that teamwork is a by-product of a high-performing team operating at an optimal level.

Throughout the process, we are guided by business strategy and the specific deliverables for which the team is accountable.

Our processes are highly customised, collaborative and interactive. Ideally, it is facilitated in an accelerated fashion (generally over 6–8 weeks) so that the team can quickly address any factors interfering with team effectiveness. All output is documented and provided to the team members for ongoing reference.

Optional coaching may also be provided to the leader, individual team members, or to the team as a whole.

Given our training in psychology and process consulting, we share a bias for authentic conversations about what is really going on in the team, or with a leader. We appreciate the need to work deeply and to understand the inner conflicts within people that can undermine change. Our work includes an understanding of the complexity of multiple perspectives at play within a team.

Our work with senior executive teams harnesses their collective talents to create:

- Cohesive groups focused on performance
- Teams with clear goals and a defined purpose
- Strong alignment with the CEO's agenda
- A transparent decision-making process
- Maximized use of time and talent
- A high-performing team that impacts business performance.

## How it Works

We conduct interviews, facilitate focus groups, and administer questionnaires and surveys to identify performance gaps and development opportunities.

The output is a research-based analysis of the team that feeds into a process that generates a comprehensive results-focused solution for improvement.

We also profile the individual team members to arrive at a team profile.

Armed with a foundational understanding of the dynamics and the issues, an offsite workshop becomes the platform for introspection and action planning. The team will decide if it requires continued external support in the form of coaching.

## Duration

Teams do not magically coalesce overnight. The team must master three dimensions of performance.

First, they require a common direction – a shared understanding of goals and values. Second, skills of interaction are crucial if the team is to go beyond individual expertise to solve complex problems, and if it was to withstand the scrutiny of the rest of the organization, business partners and shareholders. And finally, top teams must be able to renew themselves – to expand their capabilities in response to change.

Team development is a time-hungry process, with results becoming visible over time. An intervention can last between two and twelve months (or more), and depend on several factors, which may include the leader, the degree of dysfunction, the composition of the team, the level of commitment and the speed of learning and development.

## Benefits

Our facilitated approach enables your organization to leverage teams that are collaborative and focused on business imperatives, with clear accountabilities and effective channels for communication and conflict resolution.

Organizationally, you will benefit from the team's increased performance in meeting its goals and from enhanced senior leader performance in general.

At an individual level, team members will become skilled at leading and participating in teams. They will understand how to work with their peers to improve the organization and will become stronger leaders.

## Unlocking the Team's Potential

We understand the unique context, challenges, and culture of senior executive teams.

Whatever the issues and concerns facing your leadership, we can help get your team on track to successfully execute solutions by:

- Pinpointing unique issues that block effectiveness
- Helping the leader and the team align around clear organizational goals
- Developing transparent decision-making processes
- Facilitating discussion on priorities and tough issues
- Delivering a team climate of high trust and healthy conflict.

## About the Talent Institute

The Talent Institute is a privately held boutique professional services firm that specialises in strategic talent management consulting. Specifically, we focus on helping clients develop and implement strategies and practices to more effectively manage the selection, deployment, development and retention of talent to support current business strategies and to prepare for future challenges.

Our core competency lies in our ability to interpret talent analytics in the context of strategy and business impact, and the use of predictive intelligence to inform risk mitigation, capability development and talent investments.

Grounded in organizational psychology, we leverage research, analytics, expertise and industry insights to enable business performance by removing the guesswork from making decisions about people.

## Your Contact

Should you want to learn more, please contact:

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