

Are you overlooking your organisation's most important assets?

Let's get to the point. We're talking about teams. Not just the people that report to your managers but the groups of people – formal and otherwise – that deliver value for your customers and stakeholders beyond even what they can contribute as individuals.

This paper wasn't written to tell you about the rate of change, the increasingly complex environment, workplace loneliness, anxiety or the fact that mental health issues are on the rise. We know about these issues intimately because we all live with them and feel them every day. This paper presents a simple and fresh approach that will give us all an opportunity to reverse these forces and reconnect us with each other as we are wired to be. We have in front of us a unique opportunity to bring humanity and connection back into the workplace and also find new levels of performance.



Teams: the unsung heroes

Our work over 25 years with hundreds of organisations around the globe and nearly one million professionals has enabled us to codify the conditions required for the success of teams. What we observe is that there are three levels of performance within organisations and they need to be both aligned and balanced in order to deliver outstanding business results. These are individual, team and organisation.

Typically we find that businesses have great metrics for performance, customer satisfaction and employee wellbeing at the 'system' level and these are effectively cascaded to clear individual KPIs and engagement metrics. But where is most of the work done? In teams – the **missing middle** of most leadership models. Teams might have clear objectives but do they have a way to optimise their performance together? To really accelerate **how** they get work done?

We also know that teams are underperforming – almost 59% rising to 75% for cross-functional teams² so something needs to be done. According to the Centre for High Performance³, of 90% of teams that claimed to be high performing, only 17% met the high-performance criteria (which included bringing new product or services to market or making long-term increasing returns.) So, not only do many teams underperform, many of them are under the false impression they are doing well.



¹ 59% teams underperforming – Thinkwise impact of team performance survey 2015
² 75% cross-functional teams are dysfunctional: HBR: Behnam Tabrizi 2015
³ Contagious success, Susan Annunzio (over estimated performance)

Accelerating your teams

3/5 Americans classify themselves as lonely, up 7% since the previous year



Connect to perform

With more people than ever working remotely, we are seeing new challenges of isolation and disconnection. The global health insurance company, Cigna, issues a Loneliness in the Workplace report each year. They use the UCLA loneliness scale which is one of the most referenced and acknowledged academic measures of loneliness. Their 2019 report⁴ found 3/5 Americans classify themselves on this scale as lonely, up 7% since the previous year (and this is a pre-COVID study). In particular, 58% respondents say they sometimes or always feel like no one knows them well at work.

Teams can step into this void – strong teams connect people together in a shared task, provide mutual support and a learning community.

Self-Determination Theory⁵ tells us that people are motivated to work well when three conditions are met:

- 1 **Autonomy** – control over their own work and decisions
- 2 **Mastery** – the skills and knowledge to do their work well
- 3 **Relatedness** – a sense of a shared objective and connection with others

This last condition, relatedness, is particularly relevant for teams which might have been dislocated by Covid-19. Recent research by Gartner⁶ found that employees who felt well connected to their teams were 25%

more productive than disconnected colleagues.

Yet data from Squadify⁷ shows that the condition most commonly rated lowest in importance for team performance is 'strong personal connections'. This insight reveals a worrying lack of awareness among people across all organisations and sectors of this critical element in our work lives. Now more than ever, connection is key for both personal performance and for teams to overcome the distances they must work across. Safeguarding the mental health of its employees is not only the duty of the organisation, but an opportunity. Healthy, happy, connected employees will repay this investment in engagement and performance.⁸

The closer a team's mental model, the better their team performance



Align team mental models

Team mental models are a way of describing the degree to which team members have a shared understanding of different team tasks and processes. The concept was defined in the early 1990s and has become a powerful measure of how effectively a team works together. Research^{9,10} shows that the closer a team's mental model, the better their team performance. The team mental model captures both the what (vision, objectives, KPIs) and the how (processes, behaviours, culture) for the team.

Team mental models are not in conflict with diversity. Diversity is key to teams to ensure ideas are challenged and different perspectives are brought to business challenges in order to

arrive at the best solution. Shared team mental models enable teams to determine the right path for them and then to agree processes, activities and behaviours to enable them to deliver their work together.

Research by a team from the London School of Economics Masters in HR & Organisations program¹¹ found that teams who used Squadify (a platform that provides the same data to all members on team conditions) over time strengthened their shared mental models which in turn, drives performance.

Highly data-driven organisations are three times more likely to report significant improvements in decision making



Harness data, dialogue and development

Research by PwC¹² found that highly data-driven organisations are three times more likely to report significant improvements in decision making compared with other organisations. HBR takes this a step further by defining two clear benefits for leaders of data driven decision making – confidence and the ability to be more proactive.¹³

The Cynefin framework¹⁴ defined by an ex IBM-er, Dave Snowden, is helpful in making sense of an ever changing world. In this framework, many new challenges are not easily defined so teams need to take an experimental approach to try out strategies and solutions quickly and learn or pivot when appropriate. In these situations, data is the only certainty and provides an anchor for experiments and a solid basis for decision making. Our experience is

⁴ Loneliness and the workplace 2020 report, Cigna

⁵ Self-Determination Theory – Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). Intrinsic motivation and individual-determination in human behaviour. New York: Plenum

⁶ Gartner research on productivity

⁷ Squadify research October 2020 on 801 teams, 5373 respondents

⁸ Need to find this: employee well-being link to productivity

⁹ Cannon-Bowers, J. A., Salas, E., & Converse, S. A. (1993). Shared mental models in expert team decision making. In N. J. Castellan (Ed.), Individual and group decision making (pp. 221- 246). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum

¹⁰ Mathieu, J. E., Heffner, T. S., Goodwin, G. F., Salas, E., & Cannon-Bowers, J. A. (2000). The influence of shared mental models on team process and performance. Journal of applied psychology, 85(2), 273

¹¹ LSE report reference (TBP)

¹² PwC's Global Data and Analytics Survey 2016 Big Decisions

¹³ The advantages of data-driven decision-making, Tim Stobierski

¹⁴ Snowden, David J.; Boone, Mary E. (2007). "A Leader's Framework for Decision Making". Harvard Business Review. 85 (11): 68–76

that team conditions change frequently with Tuckman's Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing steps happening simultaneously and repeatedly. Frequent data collection is the key to understanding the bewilderingly dynamic situation.

However, data alone is not the answer. It is a reason to inspire dialogue in the team in order to build:

- 1 Shared mental models
- 2 Competence in having high quality conversations
- 3 Fact-based decision-making

Developing as an intact team is the final step. A report by McKinsey and Harvard¹⁵ identified the disconnect in most businesses between the increasing time spent by cross-functional teams working together to deliver business outcomes and the structure of learning and development programs being targeted at individuals, functions or levels of seniority within the firm.

They propose three activities to inspire team learning:

- 1 Setting team learning goals aligned with outcomes
- 2 Looking for opportunities to trigger team learning
- 3 Creating the right environment for team learning, in particular creating psychological safety within the team through trust building and mutual respect

A 'network of teams' is how many successful companies are already working



Building a team-based organisation

In 2004 General McChrystal¹⁶ was the commander of the US Joint Special

Operations Task force to address the growing threat of Al Qaeda in Iraq. Traditional warfare couldn't compete against the unstructured operations of Al Qaeda and the highly complex environments. It was forced to change the way it operated from a hierarchical structured model to a networked team of teams approach. Creating shared meaning, connection and a broad understanding of the bigger picture accelerated empowered execution and the ability to achieve success in a challenging context.

This approach – called 'team of teams' or a 'network of teams' is how many successful companies are already working, even if they look like hierarchical or matrix structures.

In this approach, teams share the common overarching goal and proactively connect in achieving it, changing course together as needed.

The old way was to build an organisation of functions and then devote energy to break down those same silos. The new way is to build organisations of teams, supported by function as required.

Performance is delivered by 'star teams' more than 'teams of stars'



Individuals in a team-based world

While the focus for many years has been on individual talent, research shows that performance is delivered by 'star teams' more than 'teams of stars'. This means that when selecting, promoting and developing people, our focus should now be on their ability to contribute to teams.

Beyond the tired requirement to be a 'team player', organisations should be seeking a specific set of capabilities.

Case study

Senior leadership team, Pharma

The team

HRBP of a global pharmaceutical company sees an opportunity to drive up performance by learning from the best performing teams in the business.

Then they used Squadify

10 senior teams used Squadify to assess their team conditions. HRBP works with team leaders to identify strengths of each team and shares best practice. Team leaders are coached to support their development.

The result

- Overall Squadify scores went up **7%** with team alignment increasing by **50%**.
- HR overview enables targeted development for team leaders.
- Achieved **113%** of target.

"Team learning is vital because teams, not individuals, are the fundamental learning unit in modern organisations. This is where 'the rubber meets the road'; unless teams can learn, the organisation cannot learn."

Peter Senge

Research by Dave Winsborough and Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic¹⁷ revealed that the key attributes for team members are to be:

- Results-oriented
- Relationship-focused
- Process and rule followers
- Innovative and disruptive thinkers
- Pragmatic

¹⁵ Are you a "team of learners," or do you learn as a team? And why it matters, Marla Capozzi and Amy Edmondson

¹⁶ Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World, General Stanley McChrystal

¹⁷ Great Teams Are About Personalities, Not Just Skills – Dave Winsborough and Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic

To put it even more simply, team members should be able to contribute to the team's conditions of success: create and maintain Clarity; build a supportive Climate for all and demonstrate the behaviours that are required to further the collective effort.

At the heart of this is the shift from 'me to we'. What is the primary viewpoint of the individual: themselves or the group around them?

A seismic shift is happening in society and in our workplaces that will require a new way of seeing the most important asset we have: our people. Not solely from an individual or organisational perspective but through the lens of the unit that we operate in everyday and that delivers value in complex times: the team.

What can YOU do?



Business leaders

Build an organisation around the units that deliver value – teams. Senior leaders need to set overall direction and then building autonomy in a network of teams to connect and execute. Then building the processes and culture around constantly accelerating those teams through data, dialogue and development.



HR

HR has two new opportunities. First, to build organisations as teams and then to become the performance partners for those teams. Seeing these intact units as HR used to see individuals is the path to play an essential role in accelerating performance. Use data to underpin team coaching and development.



Team leaders

Yours is the most crucial role in today's organisation. Start to see that as your primary role and connect with others to build a community of practice. Connect openly with your team to create the conditions for team success – Clarity, Climate and Competence – and use data to inform dialogue and drive performance.



Coaches

Teams offer an opportunity for coaches to deliver exceptional values to organisations. Not only are teams the drivers of value but team coaching is more efficient than working with individuals so affordability goes up and the reach to more junior leaders becomes possible. Use data to underpin team coaching and development.

Do you want to build a team-based organisation and accelerate your teams? Contact thesquad@squadify.net to get started today.

Case study

Top team in a multinational

In the beginning...

Executive team in a global multinational facing market challenges and not making their numbers. Team was disparate, lacked energy and direction to turn things around.

Then they chose Squadify

The team used Squadify 3 times over a year to get on the same page, build a plan and collaborate on team development to become a high performing team.

The result so far

- Turned around flat revenue growth to deliver **double digit growth 2 years running**.
- Improved retention and engagement.
- Squadify scores improved **29%**.
- Team alignment improved **48%**.

Squadify: making teamwork work

Squadify is a SaaS team acceleration platform. It combines the most respected leadership models and frameworks into a single, simple assessment, tracks progress and offers development insights for leaders and their teams. Squadify provides the right data to enable the right team dialogue and drives increased productivity, engagement and sales. It helps members to connect, align mental models and take action to increase their performance over an annual licence, with multiple retests and tracking insights. In 2020 Squadify was the recipient of the Learning Technology Award for best learning technology in the international sector.