



Janice Riches considers what is the key to working smarter not harder

What makes a team perform well? How do you work with the fact that many people have no experience of an economy in this sort of recession? If you are thinking about the phrase 'survival of the fittest' how do you become the fittest team in the first place? How do you achieve working smarter not harder? And what about those people who are saying that now is the time to grow? (see our other article!) How do you achieve the building blocks to do that?

The Problem

Everyone has their own thinking style, that is, what determines how they make decisions and plans, and how they deal with problems of all kinds. Yet even the most able people have only a vague idea about how their thought processes might differ from equally able colleagues, staff, customers or competitors. For example:

- Are you amazed when respected managers make decisions out of unsound reasoning?
- Are you interested in the way people's feelings can affect the quality of problem solving?
- Are you angry that people jump to conclusions without proper facts?
- Do you wonder when facts are accepted, but not implications?
- Do you find it hard to bring about changes in fixed methods or perceptions?
- Do you wish people would respond to (your) flashes of inspiration?

People take action because of what they think and they are obviously in the job in the first place because of their mind....intelligence is a prime ingredient in an organisation's success. Yet, pure intelligence on its own does not ensure effectiveness. The real trick is to bring the right mental faculties to bear on each situation. Added to that the fact that most complex business decisions require more than one person to handle them and you have the basic problem of how to develop an intelligent and yet highly performing team....defining the right process to tackle the situation most effectively, whilst developing the individuals in the team to think and act in the right way to achieve success.

The Diagnosis

Take for example a poorly performing sales team. The sales team is struggling in the current economic climate and their Director thinks that they need to work harder. Is more of the same going to benefit their performance? In some recent, real life examples the colleagues in our network have found the following:

- New kinds of thinking are required to tackle new situations, otherwise they tend to be regarded as a problem
- Understanding what kinds of thinking are most relevant drives the situation to a successful conclusion
- When a straightforward, analytical approach fails, one alternative is to be creative: people need to make a conscious choice to be creative, otherwise the mind could close down in judgement of the ideas

With the struggling sales team, an assessment of its current processes that is followed by understanding individual thinking preferences (or comfort zones perhaps) can lead to the team defining new ways of working to tackle situations previously seen as too difficult.

The Results

Developing an intelligent team that improves its performance is partly to do with improving how people get their act together and how they come to use a common language. The applications for this improved thinking performance are numerous. It applies to IT teams with stakeholder management/ influencing issues or perhaps HR teams who need to convince line management of the benefits of formal processes and there will be many more internal and external examples across all functional areas.

In the sales example, we have seen improvements representing year on year growth of 13% and senior teams gaining collaboration and making change happen. It is hard to see any team management issues where such quality assurance on thinking would not be relevant, and the value is greatest where the issues are strategic or where smart thinking, done quickly, is a critical competitive advantage.

The starting point? Perhaps for each of us in management to discover our own mental profile...that way we get a grasp of the potential for this technique across the organisation.

With thanks to Linda Skeats, one of my trusted network colleagues, for her collaboration on this article and the work of JD Rhodes on Effective Intelligence.

For an informal discussion about how assessment could benefit teams and individuals within your organisation, please contact Janice at Riches Consulting on 01225 812070 or our London office on 020 7849 6024. Find out more about us online at www.richesconsulting.com or email jriches@richesconsulting.com