

## **Achieving Successful Team working: Effective Intervention based on Psychometric Insights from the Latest Research**

Groundbreaking research into team working suggests that high performing teams not only improve organisational performance but also lead to better leadership, enhanced employee health and improved innovation. Interventions can be effectively targeted using a new psychometric tool underpinned by this research. The risk of limited long term benefits and low ROI are significantly reduced. The latest psychometrics tools can help you measure, track and improve team performance across your organisation at a domestic and strategic level.

This article describes groundbreaking research gathered over 25 years by International Team Performance Expert Professor Michael West and his team from Aston Organisation Development. Their work has led to the creation of the Aston Team Performance Inventory (ATPI) available from Test Providers ASE.

### **The Proven Significance of Team Working in Your Organisation**

In many areas of human activity and endeavour, research has clearly shown the ways in which team working can lead to greater efficiency or effectiveness in organisations. However, it has now been recognised that working in communities or teams is more fundamental to our very existence and well-being. It is well documented that humans have been operating in communities and small groups (tribes) for many thousands of years and until very recently (past 150-200 years) this has held true. Therefore team or community based lifestyles are a part of our very essence or DNA. Individuals increasingly spend a large majority of their life at work and therefore being a member of a work group or team can provide greater working life benefits above that of enhanced team performance and productivity.

The following 10 excerpts are taken from a wealth of published empirical research conducted on teams. This supports the methods and the organisational benefits that are engendered in the use of this latest psychometric instrument the Aston Team Performance Inventory (ATPI):

#### **1. Teams and Financial/Economic Performance**

An analysis of the combined results of 131 studies of organizational change found that interventions with the largest *effects upon financial performance* were team development interventions or the creation of autonomous work groups (see Macy & Izumi, 1993).

#### **2. Teams and Organisational Performance, Efficiency and Quality**

Business Psychologists Applebaum and Batt (1994) reviewed 12 large-scale surveys and 185 case studies of managerial practices. They concluded that

team-based working led to improvements in organizational performance on measures both of *efficiency and quality*.

### **3. Teams and Customer/Patient Care**

Studies in health care have repeatedly shown that better patient care is provided when health professionals work together in multidisciplinary teams (Borrill et al., 2000). And the more team working there is in hospitals, the lower the level of patient mortality (West et al., 2002).

### **4. Teams and Learning**

There is accumulating evidence that when students work in cooperative groups rather than individually, they work harder, help less able group members, and learn more (e.g., Slavin, 1983). And not without good reason. It is by working together and pooling our resources (knowledge, abilities, experience, time, money etc.) that we can most effectively accomplish our shared goals.

### **5. Teams and Delivering Strategy**

Teams are the best way to *enact organizational strategy*, because of the need for consistency between rapidly changing organizational environments, strategy and structure. Teams can coordinate the enactment of strategy amongst groups of individuals working towards shared goals. (West, Tjosvold, & Smith, 2003)

### **6. Teams and Rapid Change**

Team based organizations, with their flat structures, can respond quickly and effectively in the fast changing environments most organizations now encounter. Teams enable organizations to *speedily develop and deliver products and services* improving cost effectiveness. Teams can work faster and more effectively with members working in parallel and interdependently than with individuals working in serial. Teams *enable organizations to learn* (and retain learning) more effectively. When one team member leaves, the learning of the team is not lost. Team members also learn from each other during the course of team working.

### **7. Teams and Quality Management**

Cross functional teams promote *improved quality management*. By combining team members' diverse perspectives, decision making is comprehensive because team members question ideas and decisions about how best to provide products and services to clients. Diversity, properly processed, leads to high quality decision making and innovation (West, 2002).

## 8. Teams and Diversity

Cross-functional design teams can undertake *radical change*. The breadth of perspective offered by cross-functional teams produces the questioning and integration of diverse perspectives that enables teams to challenge basic assumptions and make radical changes to improve their products, services and ways of working.

## 9. Teams and Staff Engagement and Commitment

Staff who work in teams report higher levels of *involvement and commitment*, and studies also show that they have *lower stress* levels than those who do not work in teams.

## 10. Team Creativity and Innovation

*Creativity and innovation* are promoted within team-based organizations through the cross-fertilization of ideas (see West, Tjosvold, & Smith, 2003).

### So, Why do Teams Rarely Achieve their Potential?

Managers have recognised the value of teams as a way of organising work to achieve their goals for some years now. However converting recognition into successful action and achievement can be more problematic. Research has revealed that a number of key factors often undermine manager's attempts to introduce effective team and team based working. These include:

- Creating teams without giving them tasks
- Failing to give teams the freedom and authority to make decisions
- Failing to define appropriate size of team and mix of team members
- Building the organisation around individuals rather than teams
- Failing to develop good team processes
- Failing to provide appropriate team leadership
- Failing to develop inter-team cooperation

### Team Based Working in the Organisation - "It's An Attitude and a Philosophy"

Most individuals in organisations are at some stage involved in teams or work groups (unofficial or official) in some capacity or other. Because of the overwhelming empirical evidence that has been collected over the years to support the benefits of team based working, all organisations who use any form of team based structures should adopt the underpinnings of team based working in every aspect of their daily philosophy and attitude to work.

***"Team based working is a philosophy or an attitude about the way in which people work together – where decisions are made by teams of***

***people rather than by individuals and at the closest possible point to the client or customer”***

Markiewicz, Borril & West (2003)

### **The Capability to Benchmark against Team Types and Industries**

The Aston Team Performance Inventory (ATPI) provides the means to benchmark teams on areas that have proven to be important for health and effective performance in teams. Organisations can use the ATPI to benchmark different types of teams. These include:

- Management Teams
- Project Teams
- Action/Performing Teams/Crews
- Production Teams
- Service teams

### **Is the Team a Real Team or a Pseudo Team? Knowing makes a Real Difference**

The ATPI differs to many other team evaluation instruments, in that it looks to establish from the outset, whether the team is a “real” team or a “pseudo” team. Research has proven that ill effects on both team member’s well-being and performance are actually far greater for the team and its team members when people think they are in team, but are not really. In fact performance and well-being is far greater for those who know they are not in a team. Identifying this fundamental issue from the outset can reduce team anxiety and crystallize, for individuals what their true purpose and function should be.

### **So, How do you Define a Real Team?**

Using the ATPI, we use 4 questions to identify whether the team is a real team or a pseudo team. These are:

1. Do the group of individuals work together to produce products or services for which they are mutually accountable?
2. Do team members share goals and are mutually held accountable for meeting them?
3. Are they interdependent in their interaction with one another?
4. Is the team held collectively accountable so that the work of integrating with one another is included in the responsibilities of each team member?

### **How does The ATPI differ with Other Team and Organisation Psychometric Instruments?**

Over the past 25 years, there have been many psychometric instruments created to focus on teams be they team role measures, type indicators or organisational audit instruments.

In the creation of the ATPI, the authors and test publisher, ASE set out on a journey to create a new series of instruments for consultants, trainers and organisational development practitioners to use, that would genuinely focus on performance of teams within the organisational context but would also be both practical to use and have sound empirical evidence to support their origins.

Following an extensive literary review of the existing team measures and by talking widely to clients and practitioners about their practical experiences using a number of available instruments, we found that what was missing was the ability to deliver genuine value to the organisation in a tangible and measurable way.

Questions that were still left unanswered by using these instruments were that although the individuals in the teams received an interesting experience, the organisational value was intangible and could not be directly linked to the business or organisation.

### **What does the ATPI Measure?**

The ATPI is structured to allow you to look at linked issues between team inputs, team processes, leadership processes and team outputs. It contains 18 Dimensions and 52 Components providing a comprehensive analysis of the factors that really matter for effective team working.

The 18 Dimensions are:

#### **Team Inputs**

Task Design  
Team effort and Skills  
Organisational Support  
Resources

#### **Team Processes**

Objectives  
Reflexivity  
Participation  
Task Focus  
Team Conflict  
Creativity and Innovation

#### **Leadership Processes**

Leading  
Managing

Coaching

### **Team Outputs**

Team member satisfaction  
Attachment  
Team Effectiveness  
Inter-Team Relationships  
Team Innovation

### **The ATPI- International Recognition of the Groundbreaking Research**

The work that has gone into the creation of the ATPI has not gone unnoticed, nationally and internationally. Below is a quotation about this work, provided by the UK's most senior HR practitioner:

*“Measurement and Evaluation are essential tools of our profession. This groundbreaking, research with Michael West has shown that a range of people management practices has a marked impact on productivity and profitability.*

*This work demonstrates convincingly that the ways in which people are developed and managed makes a critical difference to the bottom line.*

*It also shows that HR Directors are in a position to shape strategy at the highest levels more than earn their keep”.*

### **Geoff Armstrong, Director General, CIPD**

Excerpt from People Management Magazine - Impact of People Management Practice and Business Performance

### **So What Benefits Can Using the ATPI Bring to Your Organisation?**

The ATPI has been used extensively in many different types of organisations within the public and commercial sectors. The issues identified and the follow up interventions have delivered measurable and tangible improvements in:

- Improved Effectiveness and Performance
- Improved Staff Motivation
- An Increase in Staff's Perception of Being Valued
- Better Communication
- Better Deployment of Skills

- Positive Effect on Customer Care
- Reduced Stress levels

## **Next Steps**

Interested in really making a difference in your organisation? Want to track team performance in a scientific and measurable way? Or are you a team performance practitioner looking to expand your portfolio of team instruments to help you accurately identify both team problems and solutions more efficiently?

Become Qualified in the ATPI!

## **How to Become An Accredited ATPI Practitioner**

ASE provides 1 and 2 Day Qualifying Practitioner Courses (depending on experience) to use the ATPI. The course is highly practical and helps you understand, measure and problems solve team dysfunction leading to team performance solutions.

The next available course dates are:

12-14 March- Greater London  
20-22 June - Scotland  
18-20 July – Leeds

For further details contact ASE's Course Coordinator Heather Phelan on Tel: 0208 996 3335 or email: [heather.phelan@ase-solutions.co.uk](mailto:heather.phelan@ase-solutions.co.uk)