

## **For High-Performing Teams, continual (self-propelled) learning is a way of life**



*“Teamwork should no longer be considered a group skill. It is an individual skill and a responsibility of everyone in the workplace.” – Christopher Avery, The Leadership Gift*

### **Teams**

are the backbone of the contemporary world of work. Exco teams run corporations. R&D teams build market share. Matrix teams break the traditional corporate hierarchy and redefine reporting structures.

### High-performing

teams, or Elite Teams, are crucial to the way modern corporations organise and execute their goals. Elite Teams aim for superior performance, which translates into a significant competitive advantage.

### One

of the many accelerators that mobilises high-performing teams towards optimum performance is a sense of personal responsibility. Each member of the team realises that he (or she) is an indispensable component of the gears that are driving success.

### As

such, each individual has to keep himself (or herself) in top form. Even if leadership provides adequate training to function effectively, team members of Elite Teams take personal responsibility for their own development.

## **Constructing an environment for self-propelled learning.**

### Self-propelled

development entails a high level of psychological safety within the team.

### Leadership

needs to allow for a degree of adaptation, experimentation and innovation. This culture inevitably means the frequency of mistakes will increase. However, mistakes are like 'cognitive catalysts', says Organisational Psychologist Professor Beverly Alimo-Metcalfe. Mistakes challenge pre-set assumptions and stimulate the generation of new – and better – ideas.

### Keeping

team members engaged and energised should be a key point on the leaders' list. The higher the engagement and sense of achievement, the more motivated they will be to self-propel their progress.

### To

generate engagement and boost ownership, Forbes recommends that leaders create individual development plans, provide performance metrics and generate opportunities for team members to take on new responsibilities outside their job function. Give them discretion and autonomy over their tasks and resources.

### Feedback

should also be offered regularly and tied to data or examples, such as the performance metrics or the individual development plan. If feedback is implemented as a tool for growth and recognition – and not an instrument to knock the team member down – it will accelerate their self-motivated learning.

### The

**opportunity to learn should be embedded in the team's flow of life.**

### Deloitte

reports that learning is the top-rated challenge among 2019's Global Human Capital Trends. Prospective employees now rate the "opportunity to learn" as among their top reasons for accepting a position. To achieve the goal of (self-propelled) lifelong learning, Deloitte recommends embedding it both into the flow of work and the flow of life:

- Leadership needs to seek out opportunities to integrate real-time learning and knowledge management into the workflow. Technology will enable organisations to explore new approaches to virtual learning. Learning occurs in small doses, almost invisibly, throughout the workday.

- Management needs to make learning more personal and targeted to the individual. Team members should be able to learn on their own time. The opportunity to learn should be packaged and delivered in convenient modes. Here, technology can play an important role.
- As teams become more central in the delivery of more types of work, leadership should offer learning opportunities that support individuals (as members of teams), providing content and experiences specific to the context of a worker's team.

Many

companies are rigid in their organisational structure and processes, which can make it challenging to implement cross-functional development and facilitate dynamic growth. Leadership has to bridge silos, knock down walls and design a system that encourages a fluid approach to learning.

Indeed,

the modern workforce is used to change and enjoys open work environments that allow them to explore and develop.

### **Millennials**

**will learn and develop...or they will leave.**

Born

between 1981 and 1996 (ages 23 to 38 in 2019), millennials are currently the largest segment in the workforce. And it is a force to be reckoned with. They want to work in small, high-performing teams that reach clear objectives. Moreover, they expect the company to offer learning and development

opportunities throughout their careers.

According to The Deloitte Global Millennial Survey 2019, the majority of millennials feel that business has the most significant responsibility for preparing their workforce for Industry 4.0 (transformation due to digitisation and Artificial Intelligence).

The survey is based on the views of more than 13,000 millennials, questioned across 42 countries and territories, including South Africa.

The survey found that more than 28% of millennials plan to leave their current organisations in the next two years due to a lack of learning and development opportunities.

A whopping 74% of millennials will leave their current employer within the next five years because they do not provide a motivating and stimulating working environment.

These are not idle threats, Deloitte warns. About a quarter of those saying they would leave within two years reported leaving an employer in the past 24 months. This is a challenge for businesses in that it threatens a stable workforce.

**Clear role definition is the starting point to self-propelled learning.**

### Despite

varying approaches to describing high-performing teams, The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) says that some common characteristics seem to be reliable indicators of a team that is not functioning at its peak or that needs intervention. The list is long, but two points deserve special attention: lack of goal clarity and poorly defined roles and responsibilities. The primary precursor for a culture of self-development is clear role-definition.

### When

members are not clear about their individual and team goals, respectively, it results in a lack of commitment and engagement. When roles and responsibilities are not clearly defined, team members don't know how to demonstrate their commitment to the team and to support team success. The result is disempowerment, which leads to dissatisfaction and eventually erodes down to apathy.

### Role

confusion increases frustration and stress and potentially creates conflict in teams. In a study of multi-disciplinary teams, research shows that being clear about team members' roles markedly improves the team's engagement, self-motivation and performance.