Developing a high-performance team: An action research study in the construction industry in Australia and New Zealand
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Contents

Background to the research

Research problem

A snapshot from the literature

Research, procedural and methodology questions

Research methodology: Action research

The action research cycle

Findings

Reflections and learnings

References

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Background to the research

Partially distributed organisation in the construction industry

Before the start of this project, the organisation was not meeting its financial goals.

Research problem

How can the organisation be transformed into a high-performance team?

- Real and complex problem

- I needed to fulfil the requirements of a doctorate

ACTION RESEARCH

A snapshot from the literature

What are high-performance teams?

- ✓ They deliver strong financial results
- ✓ They have satisfied employees
- ✓ They have satisfied customers

Source: Epstein (2004).

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A snapshot from the literature

LEADERSHIP

What leadership styles have the strongest impact on team performance?

Authentic   Shared   Servant   Transformational

Full-range model of leadership
- Transformational leadership
- Transactional leadership
- Passive-avoidant leadership

Measured with the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ)

Source: Avolio and Bass (2004), Bass (1985), Khuong, Tung & Quoc (2022), Tianyang et al. (2023), Tran and Vu (2021).

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A snapshot from the literature

TEAM COMPOSITION

Team performance is enhanced when a team fulfils these 9 team roles

Belbin's nine team roles theory

Plant

Team worker

Resource investigator

Implementer

Co-ordinator

Completer finisher

Shaper

Specialist

Monitor evaluator

Source: Belbin and Brown 2022.

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A snapshot from the literature

HACKMAN'S SIX ENABLING CONDITIONS

1. Team members work together to achieve a common goal

2. Team members are energised by a compelling direction

3. The team is diverse and well-balanced

4. Clear norms of conduct exist

5. Team members are supported by the organisation

6. Team members are supported by a competent coach

Team performance is enhanced when these conditions are met

Source: Hackman (2002).

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A snapshot from the literature

WHAT ARE THE MAIN TEAM DEVELOPMENT INTERVENTIONS?

Team training

Team chartering

Team work design

Team task analysis

Team building

Team composition

Team coaching

Team debriefing

Team leadership

Team performance monitoring

Source: Shuffler et al. (2018).

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Theoretical framework

PERFORMANCE TRIGGERS

Leadership

Team composition (Belbin)

Team conditions (Hackman)

Team development interventions

TEAM PERFORMANCE

1. Financial performance

2. Employee satisfaction

3. Customer satisfaction
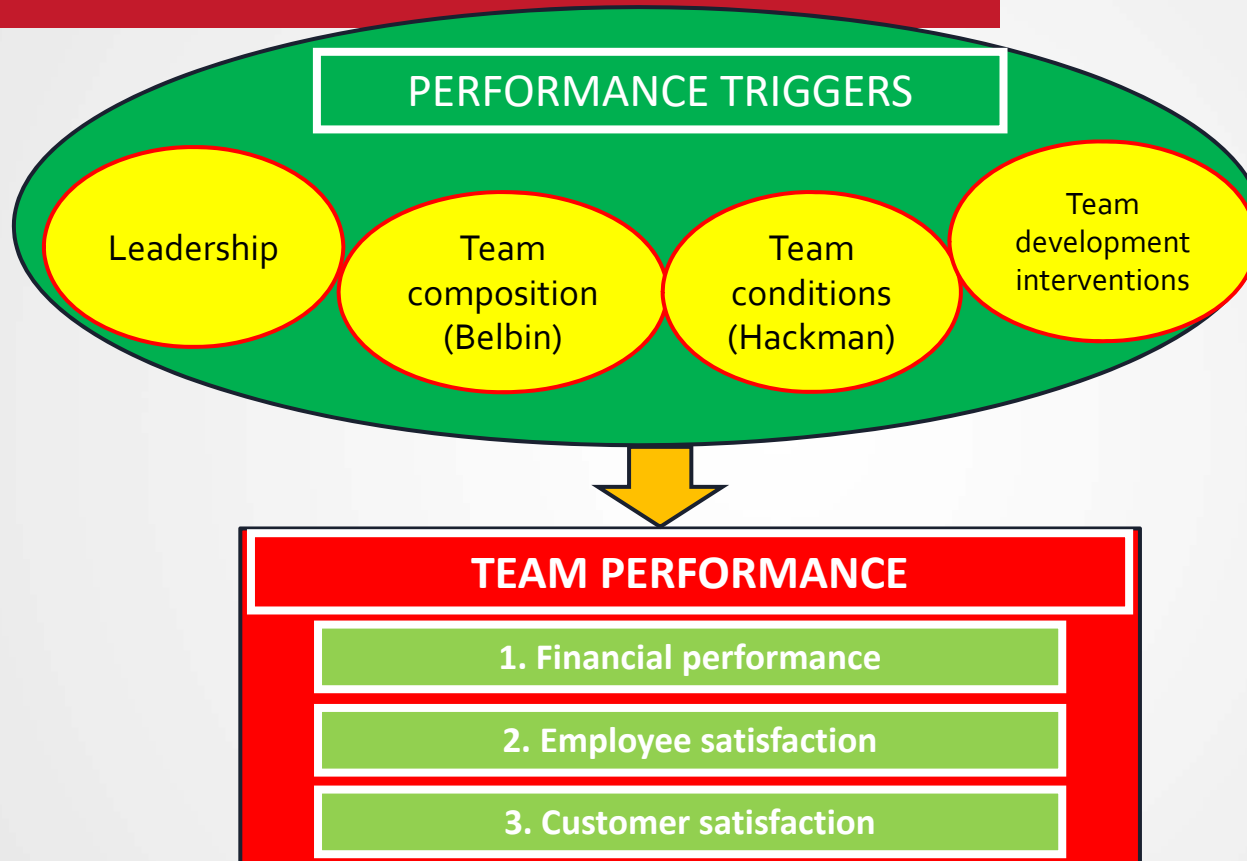
Source: adapted from Arokodare and Asikhia (2020), Bass (1985), Belbin and Brown (2022), Hackman (2002), Garavan et al. (2021), Shuffler et al. (2018).

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Research, procedural and methodology questions

Q no.	Type	Question
RQ 1 a	Research	What was the performance of the team at the beginning of the project in terms of its ability to meet its goals efficiently, foster employee satisfaction and enhance customer satisfaction?
RQ 1 b	Research	What was the performance of the team at the end of the project in terms of its ability to meet its goals efficiently, foster employee satisfaction and enhance customer satisfaction?
RQ 2 a	Research	What were the levels of (a) transformational leadership style, (b) transactional leadership style, (c) passive-avoidant leadership style, and (d) leadership outcomes within the team at the beginning of the project?
RQ 2 b	Research	What were the levels of (a) transformational leadership style, (b) transactional leadership style, (c) passive-avoidant leadership style, and (d) leadership outcomes within the team at the end of the project?

Research, procedural and methodology questions

Q no.	Type	Question
PQ 1 a	Procedural	What was the composition of the team in relation to Belbin's nine team roles theory and to what extent were Hackman's six enabling conditions met at the beginning of the project?
PQ 1 b	Procedural	What was the composition of the team in relation to Belbin's nine team roles theory and to what extent were Hackman's six enabling conditions met at the end of the project?
PQ 2	Procedural	What were the team development intervention activities conducted during the project?
PQ 3	Procedural	What were the main initiatives launched during the AR project?
RQ 3	Research	What is the extent to which each of the initiatives launched during the AR project contributed to enhancing team performance?

Procedural and methodology questions

Q no.	Type	Question
MQ 1	Methodology	What were the issues that arose during the implementation stage of the AR project and how were they addressed?
MQ 2	Methodology	What were the project, process and the researcher's learning outcomes that emerged from the AR study?
MQ 3	Methodology	How was AR used to build a HPT?

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Research methodology: AR

Conceptual or reconnaissance stage
(researcher's interests, literature review, organisational approval)

Stage 1: Baseline measurement

Team performance triggers measurement
- MLQ (leadership)
- Team composition assessment (Belbin)
- Team conditions assessment (Hackman)

Team performance measurement
- Financial performance assessment
- Employee satisfaction survey
- Customer satisfaction survey

Stage 2: AR cycle (implementation stage)
11 AR meetings
+
team development interventions

Reflect   Plan

Observe   Act
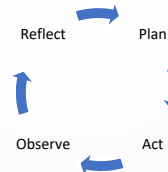
Stage 3: Evaluation measurement

Team performance triggers measurement
- MLQ (leadership)
- Team composition assessment (Belbin)
- Team conditions assessment (Hackman)

Team performance measurement
- Financial performance assessment
- Employee satisfaction survey
- Customer satisfaction survey

Evaluation survey

Observation

Source: adapted from Abraham (2016); Bass (1985); Perry (2013); Ritchie et al. (2014)

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Stage 2: the AR mini-cycles

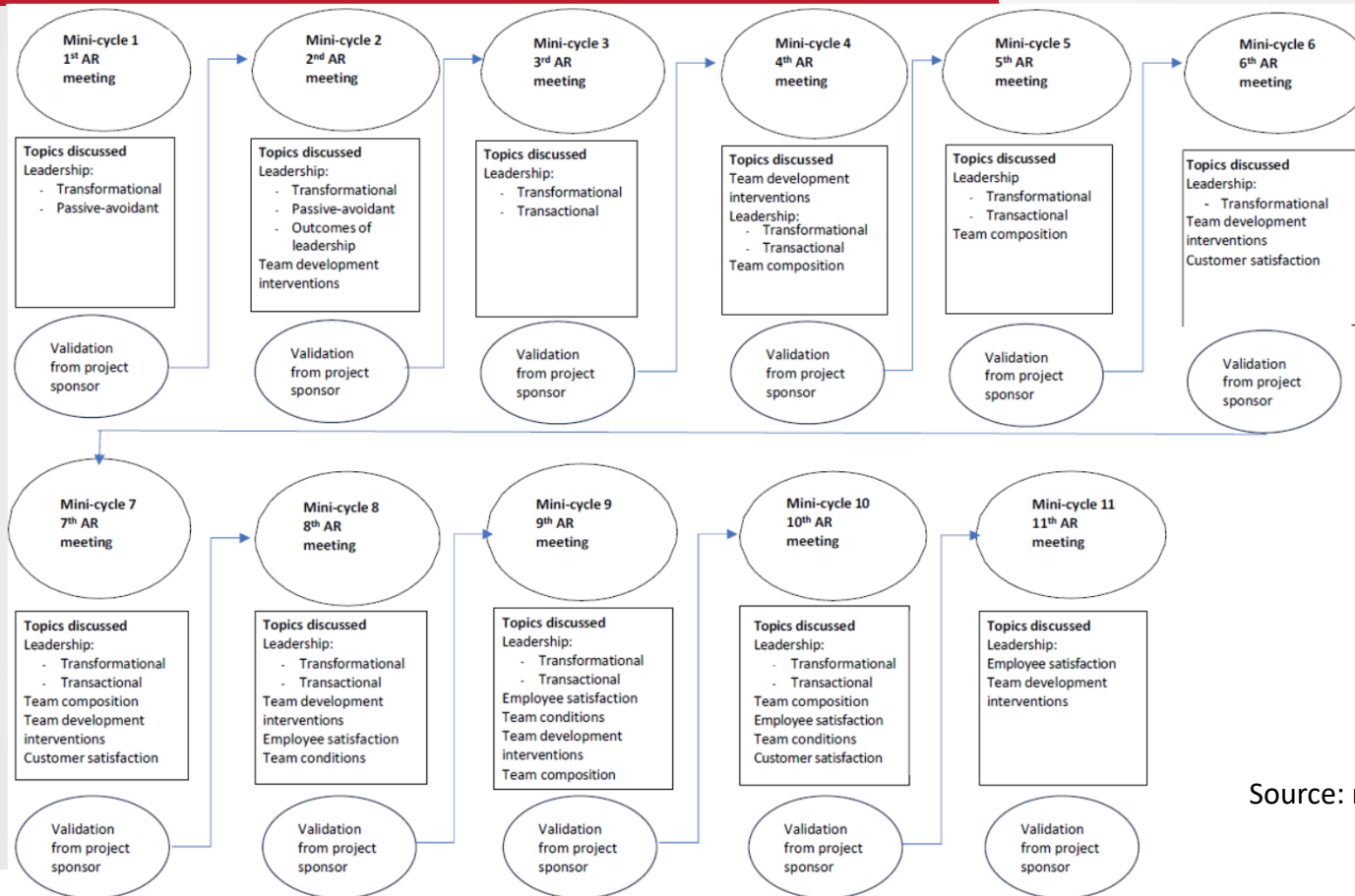|	
Duration	13 months
No. of AR meetings	11
Participants	3 senior managers and the researcher
No. of initiatives launched	23
Validation	from the project sponsor

Source: researcher's journal.

Stage 2: the AR mini-cycles

Source: researcher's journal.

The AR cycle: initiatives launched

Initiative no.	Description
1	Supervisors coaching and training
2	Regular team meetings
3	Supervisors expressing confidence that goals will be achieved
4	Conflict free environment
5	Attending team training sessions with supervisors
6	Supervisors talking optimistically about the future
7	New recruitment system
8	Delegation
9	Team chartering
10	Supervisors talking optimistically about what needs to be accomplished

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The AR cycle: initiatives launched

Initiative no.	Description
11	Supervisors challenging subordinates to suggest solutions to problems
12	Supervisors demonstrating how to assess ideas based on their potential benefit and ease to implement
13	Friday's general meetings
14	Team training by external coach
15	Team building
16	Employee of the month contest
17	New vision and mission statements
18	King of sales contest
19	King of consistency contest
20	Clear norms of conduct

The AR cycle: initiatives launched

Initiative no.	Description
21	Workplace health training
22	King or queen of participation
23	VIP Club

What were the 3 most effective initiatives to enhance team performance (according to the employees)?

1. Supervisors coaching and training

2. Regular team meetings

3. Supervisors expressing confidence that goals will be achieved

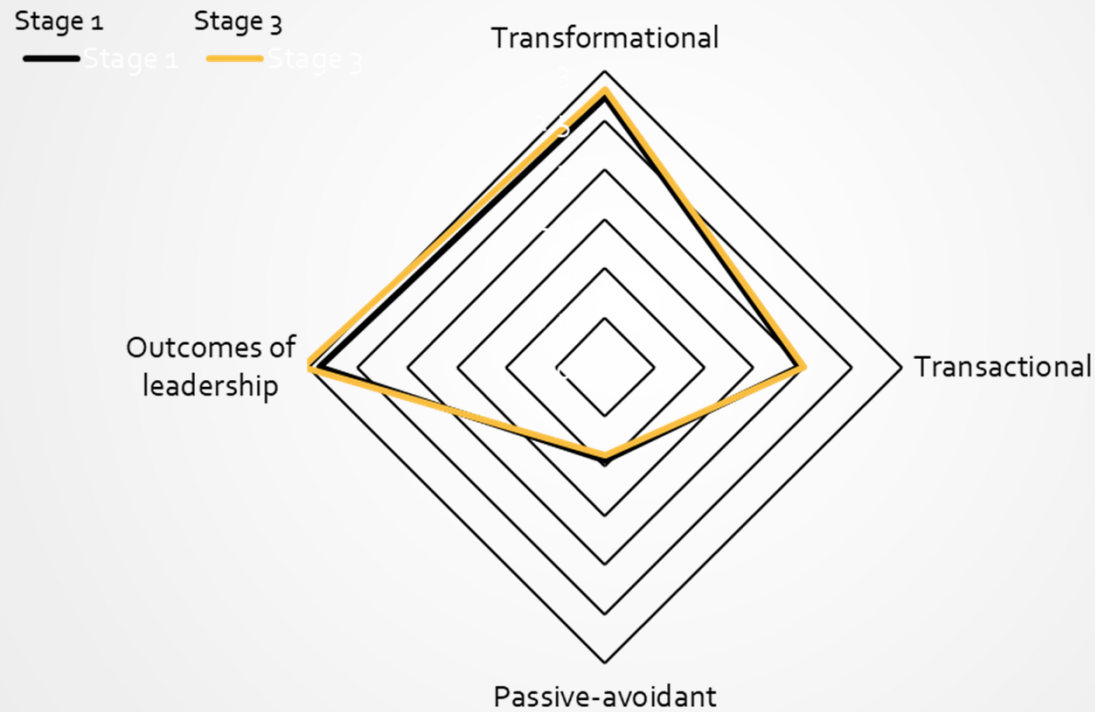Source: analysis of survey data; researcher's journal.

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Findings: Team performance

Source: analysis of survey data.

Red=stage 1
Orange=stage3

Full-range model of leadership

Source: analysis of survey data.

Findings: Team composition

Team composition roles	Stage 1	Stage 3
Plant	✗	✓ (3)
Resource Investigator	✓ (2)	✓ (2)
Co-Ordinator	✗	✗
Shaper	✗	✓ (2)
Monitor evaluator	✗	✓ (1)
Team worker	✓ (1)	✓ (4)
Implementer	✓ (5)	✗
Completer finisher	✓ (3)	✓ (3)
Specialist	✓ (3)	✗

In stage 3, six of the nine team roles were met against five in stage 1

Source: analysis of survey data.

Findings: Enabling conditions

Six enabling conditions
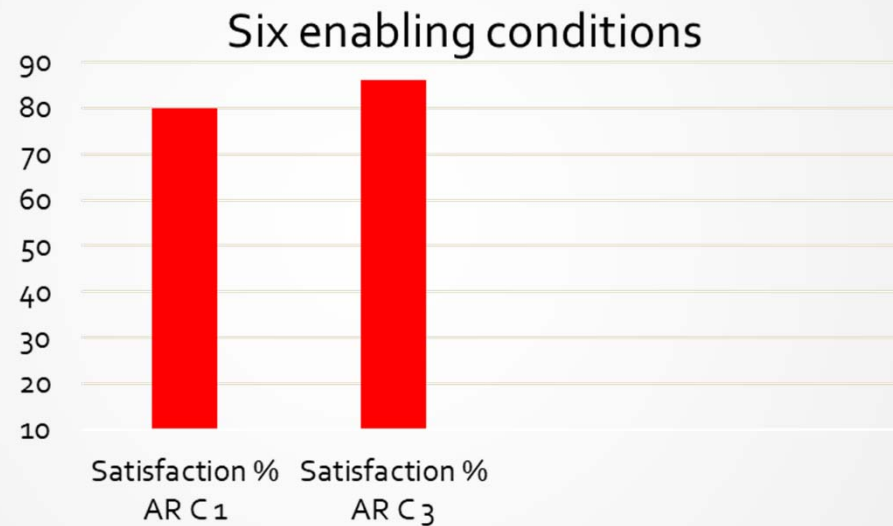
Source: analysis of survey data.

Reflections and learnings

1. Allowing the three senior managers to make mistakes was ok
2. Employees can and should be developed
3. It is possible to be a virtual transformational leader
4. Empathy
5. Competing on helping each other can enhance interaction across geographical boundaries
6. Leaders should be both transformational and transactional
7. Understanding becomes easier with simplicity
8. Sharing the decision-making process
9. Creating, marketing and selling a service package: VIP Club
10. Employees need a more profound purpose than just making sales
11. Taking full ownership
12. Leading virtual teams
13. Consistency is key to forming new habits
14. Communication technology
15. Long-life learning

Source: researcher's journal.

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Thank You