



Chandler Macleod

Unlocking the Power of Collective Intelligence



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Overview



In the article "How Pixar Fosters Collective Creativity," Ed Catmull takes us on a journey through Pixar's evolution into a powerhouse of innovation. At the heart of Pixar's success lies a culture that champions collaboration, open communication, and psychological safety—elements that empower individuals to share their ideas without fear. While the talents of individual team members are undeniably important, Catmull emphasises a game-changing insight: Pixar's brilliance stems from its ability to tap into the collective potential of its people.

This raises an intriguing question for organisations everywhere: what if we shifted our focus from individual star performers to the collective strength of our teams? Why does one group of bright minds often outshine another, equally skilled group?

The age-old adage, "two heads are better than one," invites us to consider whether we can achieve more together than alone. In an era where technology can analyse nuances and emotions, the importance of group dynamics remains clear. Humans, not machines, define problems and craft solutions. While it's true that collaborative efforts can lead to groundbreaking results, it's equally evident that not all teams function smoothly. As research highlights, some groups can be completely dysfunctional, falling short of their potential.

As our world becomes increasingly complex, the role of groups in tackling challenges is more crucial than ever. Yet, harnessing this potential requires intentionality. With AI and automation reshaping our landscape, the human ability to define problems and devise solutions will remain vital. While AI can streamline processes and generate insights, it can't replace the nuanced decision-making that comes from collective human intelligence, especially given its limitations and biases.

What if we shifted our focus from individual star performers to the collective strength of our teams?

This article delves into the essence of collective intelligence, revealing how a well-constructed team can achieve remarkable outcomes that surpass the sum of its parts. By focusing on key factors such as social sensitivity, collaboration, and cognitive diversity, we can build high-performing teams that thrive. Our goal is to equip you with a practical checklist of ideas and strategies to enhance team performance in your organisation. Together, let's explore how to unlock the full potential of collective intelligence and drive success in today's dynamic environment.

Building Collective Intelligence



Teamwork isn't just a buzzword; it's a vital ingredient for success in classrooms, workplaces, and beyond. As our lives become more intertwined and complex, understanding what makes teams tick is essential. So, how do we ensure that groups perform at their best? The journey starts with the individual—specifically, understanding what drives their unique contributions.

At the individual level, general intelligence, often referred to as the 'g' factor, has long been regarded as a strong predictor of job performance, especially in knowledge-based environments. But what exactly does this mean? General intelligence isn't just about having a wealth of knowledge or honed skills; it's more about how well you can reason, solve problems, and learn from your experiences. Think of it as the intellectual horsepower you possess to navigate various tasks and challenges.

Traditionally, many psychologists viewed group intelligence as simply the average intelligence of its members. The assumption was that two heads could do more work than one, but they wouldn't necessarily be able to think any smarter together. Some even argued that the smartest person in the room dominated group dynamics, pulling everyone along in their wake.

However, groundbreaking research from Carnegie Mellon University, led by Professor Anita Williams Woolley, reveals a more fascinating picture. In her studies, Woolley and her team had groups tackle cognitive tasks like those used to measure individual intelligence. What they found was surprising: the intelligence of group members didn't predict the group's overall performance. Instead, certain groups consistently outperformed others, regardless of individual intelligence levels.

This led to the discovery of a concept known as collective intelligence—the idea that a group can achieve a level of synergy that transcends the sum of its parts. In essence, when conditions are right, teams can harness a collective brainpower that is greater than what any individual could contribute alone.

So, what are these “right conditions” that enable a group to shine? Interestingly, factors like team satisfaction, motivation, and cohesion weren’t the keys to unlocking collective intelligence as one might expect. Instead, the dynamics that truly mattered were more nuanced.

The researchers uncovered that successful groups displayed certain behaviors and interaction patterns that facilitated this collective synergy, allowing them to tackle problems more effectively than their less cohesive counterparts.

This insight prompts us to rethink how we approach teamwork. Instead of solely focusing on individual brilliance, we should cultivate an environment that enhances the collective potential of our teams. By fostering collaboration and creating conditions that support collective intelligence, we can unlock extraordinary outcomes—where the magic happens when everyone works together.

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Factors of Collective Intelligence



When it comes to harnessing the power of collective intelligence, a few standout factors can make all the difference. Let's dive into the trio of social sensitivity, communication, and cognitive diversity, and see how they shape successful teams.

Social Sensitivity: The Heart of Team Dynamics

At the core of effective teamwork lies social sensitivity—our ability to empathise with others and understand their emotions.

Think of it as the superpower of perceiving how someone else is feeling just by reading their body language or the tone of their voice. According to researcher Anita Williams Woolley, social sensitivity—or “social perceptiveness”—is more crucial to a group's success than the average intelligence of its members.

Imagine two teams: one filled with high-achieving individuals who struggle to connect emotionally, and another with members of moderate intelligence who excel at reading each other's cues. It turns out that the second team is likely to outperform the first. This is because individuals with high social sensitivity can identify when someone is engaged, adjust their communication style based on the group's mood, and navigate conversations with an awareness of cultural nuances.

When team members can effectively perceive and respond to each other's emotions, they can significantly reduce relational conflicts, fostering a more harmonious environment.

Interestingly, research suggests that gender diversity can also enhance collective intelligence. Studies show that teams with more women often outperform those with fewer, potentially due to women's generally higher levels of social sensitivity. This insight underscores the importance of empathy in teamwork—not just as a soft skill, but as a driving force for success.

Communication: The Foundation of Collaboration

Equally important to social sensitivity is the quality and equality of communication within a team. For a group to truly leverage its collective intelligence, everyone's voice needs to be heard. Diverse perspectives can offer incredible insights, but if communication isn't evenly distributed, those insights might go untapped.

High-quality communication nurtures a culture of constructive conflict—where team members feel safe to challenge ideas and discuss objectives openly. This dialogue not only sharpens decision-making but also helps individuals align their skills with the group's goals. While having experts on board can enhance performance, their impact diminishes if they monopolise the conversation or if collaboration falters. True collective intelligence thrives on balanced and engaged communication among all members.

Cognitive Diversity: The Spice of Group Dynamics

Finally, cognitive diversity adds another layer to collective intelligence. This refers to the different ways people think, approach problems, and draw from their unique experiences.

A group that blends various cognitive styles can tackle tasks from multiple angles, leading to richer solutions. However, striking the right balance is crucial. Too much similarity can stifle creativity, while excessive differences might lead to misunderstandings and a lack of empathy. The sweet spot lies in having a mix of perspectives that enhances problem-solving without overwhelming the team dynamic.

In conclusion, when it comes to collective intelligence, social sensitivity, effective communication, and cognitive diversity are key players. Together, they create a thriving environment where teams can not only survive but truly flourish. By embracing these principles, organizations can unlock the extraordinary potential of their collective brainpower, paving the way for innovation and success.





Collective Intelligence for Teams



With the exciting insights into collective intelligence and its impact on team performance, the question arises: how can organisations effectively harness both individual and collective talents within their teams? While the concepts may seem straightforward, putting them into action can be a different story. Drawing from our experiences with both high-performing and struggling teams, we've identified a simple, three-part framework to help cultivate collective intelligence: Leadership, Team Composition, and Environment. When these elements align effectively, the magic of collective intelligence can truly flourish.

Leadership: The Catalyst for Collaboration

The role of leaders in fostering collective intelligence cannot be overstated. Are your leaders socially aware? Do they possess the skills necessary to promote effective collaboration, idea generation, and problem-solving? Leadership styles vary widely, with some managers adopting a more directive approach, while others thrive on collaboration. Look for leaders who not only have strong social skills but also engage in ongoing self-awareness and reflection.

Tips for Leadership

Embrace Experiential Learning

Encourage leaders to seek feedback and engage in self-reflection. Working with a coach can accelerate this process.

Lead by Example

Model effective communication by distributing speaking time equally among team members and encouraging open dialogue.

Be Vulnerable

Admitting mistakes and showing accountability can create a culture of psychological safety, inviting team members to share their ideas freely.

Team Composition: Crafting the Right Mix

Is your team composed of the right mix of talents and perspectives? It's crucial to ensure that all members feel safe to express their thoughts. Understanding the unique attributes of each team member and planning team composition with social sensitivity in mind can make a significant difference.

Tips for Team Composition

Define a Collective Purpose

A shared understanding of the team's mission gives everyone clarity on their roles and goals.

Create a Team Charter

Outline expectations, responsibilities, and boundaries to foster accountability.

Leverage Cognitive Diversity

Identify and map the diverse skills, learning styles, and personalities within your team. Aim for goals that require collaborative efforts, drawing on each member's strengths.

Invest in Time

Together: Building trust takes time. Set aside moments for both serious discussions and fun team-building activities to strengthen bonds.



Environment: Cultivating a Collaborative Culture

Does your organisational culture support collaboration and open communication? The systems and structures you put in place can either foster or hinder collective intelligence. It's essential to align your organisational culture with the behaviors and mindsets that encourage collaboration.

Tips for Environment

Clarify Organisational Purpose

Ensure that every team member understands their role in achieving the organisation's goals. If there's confusion, it's an opportunity to carve out your team's contributions.

Address the "Elephant in the Room"

Avoiding tough conversations can stifle collaboration. Tackling core issues head-on creates a healthier team dynamic. **Measure Collaboration:** Regular assessments can track your team's collaborative efforts and identify areas for improvement. Use objective data to facilitate discussions about challenges and successes.

Analyse Communication Flow

Identify barriers to communication. Encourage a culture where all voices are heard and create spaces for open dialogue.

By focusing on leadership, team composition, and the right environment, organisations can tap into the incredible potential of collective intelligence. When these elements come together, teams can thrive, driving innovation and achieving remarkable outcomes. It's about creating an ecosystem where collaboration is not just encouraged but celebrated—a place where the whole truly becomes greater than the sum of its parts.



How can we help?



Chandler Macleod can help you to:

- ✔ Discover individuals aligned with your culture and invested in your organisation's success.
- ✔ Assess, coach, and nurture high-performing, socially aware leaders.
- ✔ Understand interpersonal dynamics to improve team performance.
- ✔ Create environments where high-performing teams can thrive.
- ✔ Leverage strengths and identify obstacles to unlock your organisation's full potential.

Chandler Macleod has been helping organisations and employees find their BestFit™ since 1959.

Our national footprint means we can support your business wherever you need it.



FIND YOUR TEAM PULSE

Invest in your people, retain your high performers and improve your team culture



RETAIN


Delve Deeper

Investing in your people and teams is paramount to retaining high performers and fostering a thriving organisational culture. When employees feel valued, supported and understood, their engagement and productivity show the results. Prioritising team development not only enhances individual performance but also strengthens collaboration and cohesiveness within the team.

Discover Team Pulse


We are excited to introduce Team Pulse, an innovative solution designed to support team cohesiveness and culture. Team Pulse begins with a concise team dynamics assessment, providing actionable insights into team strengths and areas for improvement. This is followed by a facilitated 90-minute team feedback session, where members can openly discuss findings, share perspectives, and collaboratively develop strategies for growth. Integrating Team Pulse into your development programs can nurture a high-performing, harmonious workforce committed to achieving collective goals.

- ✓ **Enhance Collaboration and Cohesiveness**
Strengthen team bonds and improve collaboration through structured feedback and strategic planning.
- ✓ **Actionable Insights**
Our team dynamics assessment provides clear actionable insights that are easy to implement.
- ✓ **Facilitated Team Feedback Session**
Engage with our Chandler Macleod Consulting team to truly action the insights delivered.
- ✓ **Understand your Team Dynamics**
Teams benefit from understanding their differing work and communication styles.
- ✓ **Boost Engagement and Productivity**
When employees feel valued, their motivation and performance levels rise, driving overall productivity for your organisation.



**Take the first step
towards a
high-performing team**

Talk to your Chandler Macleod Consultant for more information or contact us:

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