# Maximizing Multi-Disciplinary Team Impact in High-Performance Sport: Exploring Problem Solving, Decision-Making, Expertise, & Team Performance.
## Part 5: High Performance Teaming

**Ryan King**[1]

[1.]Blended Intellligence

Multi-Disciplinary Team; Shared Expertise; Trust; Learning Disposition; Cognitively Diverse Team; Collective Cognitive Repertoire; Inter-Disciplinary Collaboration; Team Heuristics; Shared Mental Models

## Overview

The concept of multi-disciplinary high performance teams has become increasingly prevalent in elite high-performance sport. However, the effectiveness of such teams depends on various factors such as the team's shared expertise and consciousness, the presence of a clear purpose, mutual respect and trust between members, and a learning disposition. Additionally, it is essential to distinguish between high-performance teams and working groups or pseudo-teams, which lack the essential characteristics of a high-performance team. Cognitively diverse teams that leverage the collective cognitive repertoire of diverse teams can deliver better outcomes in complex scenarios. However, it is necessary to understand the risks and challenges of inter-disciplinary collaboration and the susceptibility of team heuristics and shared mental models to systematic thinking errors, blind spots, and inaccuracies. To enhance team performance, it is crucial to focus on "teaming," which emphasizes how teams approach their work collectively and why, rather than the status of a high-performance team. This paper will explore these themes and investigate how they apply to elite high-performance sport.

## Teams

Do teams have shared expertise or consciousness alongside their collective intelligence (Foire et al 2008)? We often look at teams as having a clear purpose, shared goals, shared vocabulary, shared repertoire, time bound deliverables and mutual respect and trust between members. These might be utopic characteristics that support effective team working however, does this terminology support the creation and effective performance of expert teams that are looking for solutions to novel and complex problems that have been identified? There are many pitfalls that can get in the way of the performance of teams. Power dynamics and gradients, team fissures, conflict, relationship issues, group think, deference to perceived authority, silence and fear of speaking up, ambiguity of purpose, lack of clarity and

goals to name but a few issues (De Dreu & Weingart 2003; Garvin & Roberto 2001; Roberto 2004). As soon as we create a team, there is an inherent risk of social disharmony, perceived hierarchy, ambiguous and toxic climates derailing effective team working (Cruickshanks & Collins 2013).

## Working Groups or Teams:

Alongside this, we also must recognise that high performance team working isn't always necessary and is sometimes given the term without fitting the definition. Working groups and pseudo teams are examples of when groups of individuals are assembled to achieve an outcome without the benefit of time or having the key characteristics defining high performance team (West & Lyubovinikova 2012). For a team to be considered 'high performance', it must have shared and challenging goals, mutual accountability and inter-team member respect through a learning disposition all being central to its performance (Edmondsum 2012). Again, defining what the team is and highlighting some of its characteristics might not help us to describe how we leverage everyone's information, knowledge, tools, perspectives and mental models and certainly doesn't help us to leverage one's individual repertoire as part of a cognitively diverse team (Hong & Page 1998; 2004). It may also be worth asking whether teams work together for long enough to begin to establish shared and blended consciousness, repertoire and skills. In elite sport are individuals expected to work across multiple 'working

groups' on different projects rather than as part of a high-performance team?

## Cognitively diverse teams

We recognise the importance of diversity in problem solving and have argued that leveraging the collective cognitive repertoire of diverse teams (i.e. information, knowledge, tools, perspectives and mental models) can deliver better outcomes in complex VUCA scenarios. In elite sporting contexts where MDT work together to support coach and athletes, can we map the individual and collective perspectives, tools-heuristics and mental models? Is it possible to peer into the cognitive repertoire of the group and in doing so, would we see an evolved set of knowledge and tools that are in fact, inter-disciplinary in nature and what risks and challenges might this throw up? Would we find that team heuristics and shared mental models are also susceptible to systematic thinking errors, blind spots and inaccuracies by assumption? In better understanding collective cognitive problem solving, could we support practitioners transitioning into teams to see beyond their tools and see how they work with them in tandem with others? Could we develop a new vocabulary and way of thinking that supports the implicated nested skills that are taught in higher education in a more purposeful way, and could we build process and approaches that move beyond confirming the characteristics of team work to something quite different? Can we articulate what cognitively diverse team works look like when set to

work in complex dynamic performance sport contexts and significantly enhance this?

## Team Vs Teaming

One final thought is given to the term high performance team. This, for the practitioner aspiring to work in elite high-performance sport might seem like they have made it and once there, keep their head down and hold on to the status could well be the goal. Teaming, a concept socialised by Amy Edmondsun (2012) gives a different emphasis to how we might perceive High Performance Teams. Edmondsun suggests we should move away from the title and/or status focusing more on ways of working and the levels of performance that might be attained or achieved over time. The concept of teaming emphasises 'doing' rather than 'being' enabling the team to focus on how they approach their work collectively and why. In elite sport, do we set up structures to breed teaming, which lends itself to creating the conditions for optimal performance or do we use the term high performance teams, in reference to a status in a hierarchy. In essence, when we consider elite sport we tend to think of high performance teams with high performance MDTs and yet, the titles don't necessarily help us to gauge or define the type of work that the team does together or whether it is effective.

## Final thought

In elite high performance sporting contexts today, there is an enormous amount of pressure on athletes, coaches and the support team that work with them. The financial rewards, celebrity status, commercial incentives, performance bonuses and association with winning can be highly lucrative. In most cases the goals of the organisations are to win, and this outcome goal is clear but often very unrealistic. There is an ongoing and ever-changing narrative about how teams and athletes do win. The processes that underpin performance, aligns with the coaching philosophy and is individualised (or not) to the athlete seems to be both a 'black box' and a 'messy picture' which when verbalised, doesn't make logical sense. Many practitioners working in sport aligns with the language of complexity, performance problem solving, creativity and innovation. Does this narrative need more scrutiny, and does it fit with the needs of the coaches and athletes the MDTs work with?

## Summary

In summary, the paper provides insights into the challenges and benefits of multi-disciplinary high-performance teams in elite sport and encourages a focus on how teams approach their work collectively and why. It highlights the importance of cognitively diverse teams and the need to understand the risks and challenges of inter-disciplinary collaboration. Ultimately, the paper encourages a shift in focus from the status of a high-performance team to the process of teaming, which can create the conditions for optimal performance in elite sport.

We have explored the effectiveness of multidisciplinary high-performance teams in elite

sports. It highlights the importance of shared expertise and consciousness, a clear purpose, mutual respect and trust, and a learning disposition for effective team working. However, challenges such as power dynamics, conflict, group think, and lack of clarity can hinder team performance. Additionally, working groups and pseudo-teams lack the essential characteristics of high-performance teams. Cognitively diverse teams leveraging collective cognitive repertoire can deliver better outcomes in complex scenarios but may be susceptible to systematic thinking errors and blind spots. To enhance team performance, the concept of "teaming" emphasizes how teams approach their work collectively and why, rather than the status of high-performance teams.

## About Blended Intelligence

Blended Intelligence is not just a consultancy service, it's a game-changer for high-performance sports organizations. By leveraging the power of diverse teams and innovative technology, Blended Intelligence enables collaborative problem-solving and delivers tailored solutions to complex performance challenges. With a focus on shared intelligence and a commitment to maximizing competitive advantage, Blended Intelligence is helping teams think differently and achieve brilliant outcomes.

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