# totem

Guide

High Performing Teams

What do we need to do to build great teams? We might sometimes feel blessed with a wonderful team – and at other times, wonder how we ended up with such a difficult team!

We don't usually have the luxury of starting from scratch and recruiting in all the best employees we could dream of – so how do we get the best outcomes with the team we have?

In this course we'll explore how teamwork can lead to great outcomes, what gets in the way and how to overcome those classic obstacles.

## Learning Outcomes:

- Know why teamwork is considered to be so powerful – yet many of us don't get to see those benefits, just the challenges!
- Understand how people bring different perspectives, strengths and characteristics to the team and explore what this looks like for your team
- Know why goals, values and communication are so important for teams and know how to agree these things with your team
- Have tools and tips for further exploring and building a high performing team

## Personal Reflection Notes Space

Reflect on a team you're working with now (or you might want to do this with each of the teams you're working with). What would you consider to be that team's strengths? What do they together seem to be good at?

What would you describe as the gaps in the team, things that are missing or things the team is not so good at?

It can be helpful to know what you want from learning, so that you can ask questions along the way and reflect on your specific challenge.

As you begin this course, consider what you want to gain from it. What would you like to learn about great teamwork?

What challenges are you facing with your team(s) currently?

**Personal Reflection Notes Space**

When a group of people works together with a clear purpose, autonomy to use their skills and complementary approaches to getting things done, amazing things can be achieved.

Why don't we always see such amazing outputs from the teams we work with?

Often it's because teams have been pulled together from the people who are available, or after various restructures you've ended up with a team that might not have been quite designed that way had you been starting from scratch.

That's not necessarily the best way to get a great team.  We're often working hard to make the best of a far from ideal situation.

When we want a good team, we often focus our efforts on making sure we have people who have the technical expertise or experience we need.

Have we got people with the right qualifications and experience recruited into the roles?  Or if you're building a team across departments you might focus on simply having representation from Finance, IT and Marketing.

Whilst this approach can be very helpful for making sure you have the knowledge around the table that's critical, it is not the fundamental ingredient for great teamwork.

What if all the people around the table are risk averse?  Or all but one team member are creative types, and there's one person who is more interested in implementing?  We each have things we are naturally good at and we find easy, so as well as a mix of technical expertise, we need a mix of personal skills and ways of working.

**Part of what makes a great team is having a group of people working to their strengths, and appreciating the benefit each other person brings.**

# High Performing Teams

It's helpful to understand the different aspects of work and the different styles or preferences that we tend to see from people working together.

Think about something you're trying to achieve – increased profitability, improved customer service, or the setting up of a new service or product – you will most likely find that any goal will lead to the following aspects of work/

**Plant**
- Generating ideas on what to do

**Coordinator**
- Coordinating people, delegating tasks and keeping the focus on the overall goal

**Resource Investigator**
- Connecting with people outside of the team, networking and kick-starting momentum

**Shaper**
- Energising people to get to the desired outcome at pace and maintaining momentum

**Specialist**
- Pulling in specialist expertise as required to get the job done

**Evaluator**
- Critically evaluating the work and managing risks

**Team worker**
- Keeping people in the team happy

**Implementer**
- Getting on with the tasks to be done

**Completer Finisher**
- Checking everything has been finished and done correctly

Each person in your team will have aspects of that list that they have natural strengths in.  The names in the list are known as the Belbin team types.

There are benefits and downsides to each of these preferences or natural styles of working, which is why having a team made up of too many people with one style can be damaging or make it difficult to achieve your goals.

A key part of this course includes you better understanding, and helping others understand, these different ways of working, and how we can make the best of them.

## Personal Reflection Notes Space

Think of a time now when a team has worked well together.  It might have just been three people working together on a task, or a larger team making a decision.  What contributed to that working well?

How about when a team has not worked well together.  What was missing?  Was there a gap in some of the work aspects required?  Or did conflict arise between the different styles of working?

What can you learn from these experiences about how to make the best of a team?
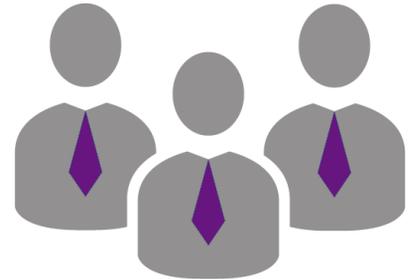
**Personal Reflection Notes Space**

# High Performing Teams

As we looked at the different aspects of teamwork, you probably noticed which of the Belbin team types most described you, and perhaps you even considered which people in your existing team would fit into which areas of natural preference.

This is a great starting point to reviewing the strengths and gaps of your existing team. Pick one team for now to work through, then you could always repeat this exercise for other teams.

Look now at the descriptions of different aspects of teamwork on pages 12-16, and to help you reflect on how that comes to life in your team, we have also described the likely benefits and drawbacks.

The table on pages 10-11 is designed to give you space to record your reflections on people in your team and what you think are their strengths or preferences.

It's worth keeping in mind that we can all do all of these things, but we have preferences – things we do most naturally and find easy. Most people will have two main areas they will draw on most often.

## Personal Reflection Notes Space

| Member of my team | Top two Belbin types I think this person is good at | Why? | Actions |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ann Example | Shaper Plant | I've seen Ann come up with lots of ideas and keep the team motivated | Reflecting on this makes me realise I could be better using Ann's strengths at the start of a project, then making sure she knows that once we all agree on an idea, we need to stay focused on that. Sometimes I get frustrated with her, when she's just coming up with ideas all the time – but I need to acknowledge that's a downside of her strength. |
| | | | |
| | | | |

## Personal Reflection Notes Space

| Member of my team | Top two Belbin types I think this person is good at | Why? | Actions |
|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  |

## Plant

This type of person tends to generate a lot of ideas.

The benefits are that they bring creative thinking, looking at things differently, breaking the mould / challenging current thinking and generating ideas on how things can be better.

The drawbacks can be that they find it difficult to communicate their ideas or gain others' buy-in. They can keep coming up with ideas even after everyone has decided on the way forward, causing some tension.

## Coordinator

This type of person tends to be good at coordinating people, delegating tasks and keeping the focus on the overall goal.

The benefits are that they are good delegators, recognising others' abilities and feeling confident asking people to take on tasks. They clarify the goal being worked on and who's doing what.

The drawbacks are that they can be seen as too detached as they don't "get their hands dirty" – they just delegate. They can also be seen as manipulative in the way they ask everyone else to do the work.

## Resource Investigator

This type of person tends to connect with people outside of the team, networking and kick-starting momentum.

The benefits are that they pull ideas from other places, network and keep an eye on what's happening outside of the team.

The drawbacks are that they can lose momentum as the work or project progresses and can miss small, yet sometimes important details.

## Shaper

This type of person tends to energise people to get to the desired outcome at pace and they maintain momentum.

The benefits are that they are energetic, good at keeping the team motivated and focused on the goal.  They're keen to get things done and achieve the desired outcomes.

The drawbacks can be that they're seen as a bit of a bulldozer, sometimes aggressively pushing others to get things done.

# High Performing Teams

## Specialist

This type of person tends to pull in specialist expertise as required to get the job done.

The benefits are they are often experts in their field and they are keen to keep learning more.  This usually means they can find an answer if they don't already know it and will share their knowledge.

The drawbacks are that they can be seen as too narrow in their focus.  They can come across as lacking interest in all other aspects of the work.

## Evaluator

This type of person tends to critically evaluate the work and manage risks.

The benefits are that they objectively review information, analyse, problem solve and come to well-reasoned, clear decisions.

The drawbacks can be their critical questioning of everything.  This can have the effect of demotivating others and dampening passion for the desired outcomes.

## Team Worker

This type of person tends to keep people in the team happy.

The benefits are that they are great listeners, understanding people and keeping the team working well together, by smoothing out conflicts.

The drawbacks can be that they're so keen to keep harmony that they lack decisive action, and can be seen as adding little value (until they're no longer in the team, when conflicts can erupt!)

## Implementer

This type of person tends to get on with the tasks to be done.

The benefits are that they are efficient, focused and keen to take on any work necessary to get the job done, and on time.

The drawbacks are that they can be seen as too narrow in their focus, putting efficiency and getting things finished on time, above checking if these are the right things to be doing.

## Completer Finisher

This type of person tends to check everything has been finished and done correctly.

The benefits are their eye for detail, high standards and a willingness to check, check and check again that everything is just right.

The drawbacks can be that they are seen as extreme perfectionists, striving for an impossible level of accuracy and worrying about small details. They can upset others by not delegating particular tasks or showing their lack of trust in others' ability.

## Personal Reflection Notes Space

Consider which one or two aspects of teamwork you most enjoy. You might find it useful to share the definitions given here with colleagues, friends and family too, to see which benefits and drawbacks they recognise in your behaviour.

Now consider sharing all this with your team. You might find it useful to show them the wheel and descriptions, and ask them which preferences they believe they have… "Which aspects of teamwork do you most enjoy? What comes easy to you? How might understanding all of our preferences help us work together more effectively as a team?"

Very often we hear clues to people's natural strengths when they say things like, "well everyone does that don't they?" "yes I do that, but it's easy and anyone can do that."

The fact that they find something so easy is a clue to it being a natural strength for them and they are likely to find it frustrating that everyone else is not equally talented in that area.

## Personal Reflection Notes Space

Also have a think about how well this team you're thinking about works together.

What strengths would you describe of this team?  What do they achieve really well together?

What gaps do you see in this team?  Are there aspects of the Belbin Team Wheel missing in your team?  What impact do you see that having?  Are there conflicts that arise within the team?  What might be the cause of these, looking at what you believe are the different preferences of the team members?  Are you seeing different personalities clashing?

A model or framework is a helpful starting point, but it's not the complete answer or picture.

What else do you think your team needs, that perhaps isn't reflected in the Belbin types?  Is there anything else you want to make sure your team is doing?

This will be really helpful to reflect back on when we talk about goals, values and ways of working – as your expectations will be critical in those discussions.

## Personal Reflection Notes Space

How often have you been working on something with one or more others, and found some way through that you each had a slightly – or very different idea of what you were working towards?

When people talk about setting SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) objectives or spending whole meetings defining goals, we can often groan thinking that sounds like too much time spent on what is surely obvious.  And yet so often, it is not obvious at all.   What are we working towards?  Why?  How will we know we're doing well?

If these questions feel too big and vague, try something more specific like:

- How will you know when this project is complete?

- What might good look like?

- How do we all know we're doing a good job?

- What are the clues or signs of success?

- What does this company provide for customers?

- How does that make us money?

- How can we provide the best outcome for customers?

- How can we improve our profitability?
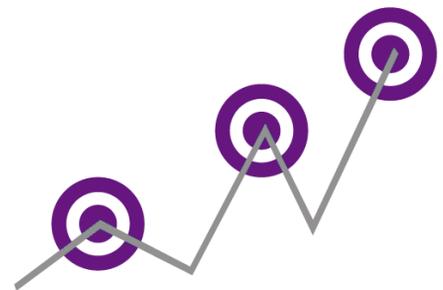
Much of the research in organisational psychology and business literature highlights the benefit of a clear purpose to unite teams and help them succeed.

*How can we all be headed in the same direction if we don't know where we're going?*

Spend some time reflecting on the following questions – and then take them to your team to reflect on too.

## What is your purpose as an organisation?  Why is that your purpose?

Work to balance both the financial purpose of shareholder value or profitability and the wider purpose like helping customers have an easier life or provide a product that makes it easier to do X or Y.

This is important because the financial goals are usually given, but it's the wider or more feel-good purpose that people find more motivational.  How do you make the world a little better or brighter through what you do?

## What tells you you're doing well in delivering that purpose?  What clues are there that you're doing a good job?

Again clarify this for both financial measures and other indicators that you are keeping customers happy or providing a quality product/service.

## What are you specifically working to achieve at the moment?  What goals do you have?

A common mistake leaders make is trying to get clear on all these answers themselves, before sharing the answer with the team.  This misses the point - as reflecting on these questions together and forming your answers can be a great way of building a cohesive, bonded team.

When people talk about SMART objectives, this stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.  There are various alternative suggestions for what SMART stands for, each of them useful, but this one is particularly helpful for teams.

- What **specifically** will you do?

- How will you **measure** you have achieved it – or are making progress in that area?

- How do you know this is **achievable?**  What steps will you need to take in order to achieve it?  Who will do what?  Is everyone clear on their specific roles and how they interact with each other?

- How is this particular goal **relevant** to your business purpose, your market conditions, customer requirements and/or company vision?

- What is the **timescale** for this?  When do you want the work to start?  When do you want to see the first clues that you're having the impact you wanted?  When will you review progress?  How?  Is there an end date or deadline?  If so, what is it?
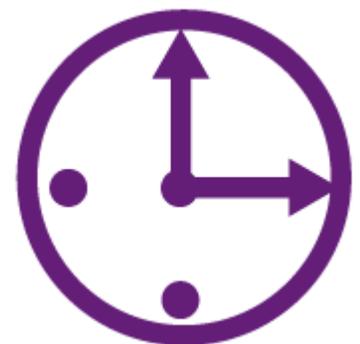
**You would be forgiven for thinking this is overkill.**

Surely we don't need to ask and answer all those questions.  Well, give it a try. Better to have had a go at answering some of those questions than see it all fall apart later on.

You might be surprised how difficult people find the questions, because they were never that clear before on what they were working towards.

You might also be surprised how motivational people find thinking through this and agreeing the answers.  Will you need to ask all these questions every time you agree a new piece of work?

Probably not, but you'll start to find your own list of questions that you do find most useful.

What questions might you find it useful to add to the list on the previous page? How might you re-word these questions so that they better suit your business and culture?

**Personal Reflection Notes Space**

**We know what we're doing, now we need to consider how we do it**

Difficulties can appear in teams when the goal is clear and everyone's roles in achieving that goal have been agreed – yet we go about things differently and hit problems.  The key questions here are:

- What is our code of conduct as a team?
- How do we hold each other to account for what we said we would do and how we said we would be?
- If we're trying to achieve X for the purpose of Y, how do we need to be?

We often talk about what we need to do, what needs to go on the action or to do list, but as the saying goes, we're human beings not human doings.  How do we need to be?

Getting this right allows you to set out how you will communicate as a team.  Again this is something worth exploring with the team.  It is no good having the leader of a team turn up at a meeting and say, "here is a list of our team's values" – it has to be something the team has designed together.

When teams get together to define their values or code of conduct, it's really helpful to give a few examples to bring things to life.

If we just said our values are: customer-focused, efficiency and integrity – what do those really mean?  How would I know if you were being efficient?

And how would I challenge you on that if I thought you were not being efficient??

And so these are the questions we recommend you explore with your team:

- How do we want to be as a team?

- What is important to us about how we work and achieve our goals?

- Let's explore some examples – what sort of things have we or others done before that have reflected the sort of principles and values we appreciate in this team?

- What was it about each example that we appreciated?

- What word or phrase might summarise that as a value, principle or standard of behaviour?

- How would we summarise that discussion into 3-6 values – or a code of conduct?  (3-6 is a rough guide – you could have fewer than 3 or more than 6, but you want to keep it to a manageable number).

- How will we hold each other to account for these?  How will we call people out for not following the code of conduct?  How do we expect each other to respond to being held to account?

The great news is we have a language now for challenging each others' behaviour. For example I might say in a meeting, "I'm concerned that our focus on getting the cheapest materials possible for our new product is not in line with our principle of quality."

Or we remind ourselves of the values at the start of a meeting and ask, "how do we consider this decision we need to make in a way that reflects our value of integrity?"

Mismatched, misunderstood or miscommunicated expectations are often a starting point for conflict, so having a shared set of principles to work to can be the foundation for clearer expectations across a team.
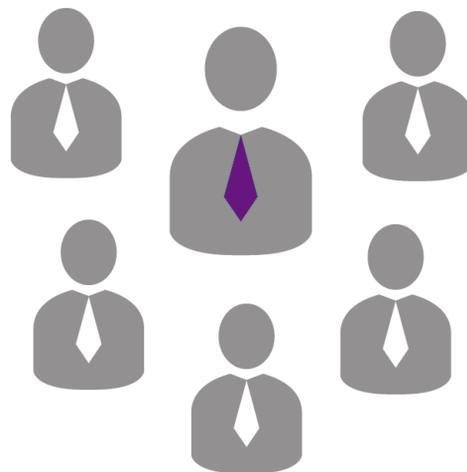
## What if a new person joins the team?

You might share with the new recruit: "These are our team values, or our code of conduct if you like. We would love you to join our team, and we will hold you to account for staying true to these values. Are you ok with that?"

## Personal Reflection Notes Space

What has stood out for you in this learning topic on values?  What are your learning points to take back and share with your team?

What is important to you about your work?  How does your work, environment and experience day-to-day need to be, in order for you to feel good about your work?

Your answers to that question might start to reveal your own personal values, so try that question with your team too.

Or you could make it about the specific purpose of the team.  Eg a finance team might explore – "what is important to each of us about reporting – are we more interested in accuracy or profitability?"

Or a marketing team might discuss, "what is important to us about the way people perceive our brand through the marketing material we send out?"

A team pulled together from different departments looking at developing a new product or service might ask, "what is most important to us about this new product?  What might our customers say about this product that we would be most proud of?"

What questions could you add to this list to make it more useful?  How might you re-word these questions so that they better suit your business and culture?

**Personal Reflection Notes Space**

**The number one problem in most, if not all organisations: communication**.

It's helpful to be aware of the fact that communication between two human beings can be very difficult.

Even if you have good relationships with people, you will still have a different understanding of a particular phrase or word, because of your different upbringings and points of reference – so there will be misunderstandings.
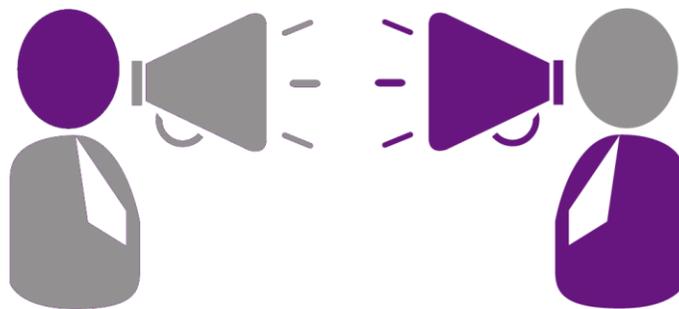
Help is at hand in the form of clarifying statements and questions.

The more you can encourage people to spend time understanding each other, the more you are likely to find success in team communications.

**Encourage your team meetings to focus on understanding perspectives**.

The concept is to make sure people are focused on the same sort of thinking at the same time, as this helps us understand perspectives and move towards agreements.  Try using statements and questions like:

- Can you say more about that please, so we can all understand your view on this?

- When you say you agree with X, but think Y – can you help us understand more about what you agree with, and what you disagree on?  What's the other person's view on that?

- We seem to have one view at the table that X is our best option and one view at the table that Y is our best option, what other views are there?

- Joe has shared his view on X, and some of us have said we're not sure about it. Before we jump into who agrees and who disagrees, let's spend some time getting clear on what Joe's view is.  Can someone else please summarise their understanding of Joe's view?

The idea here is not to add these questions and extra understanding requests onto *every tiny thing that every person says*.  When the focus seems to be on coming to a decision before hearing people out, these tools might help you ensure the team comes to a better decision.

Here are some questions for you to consider with your team about wider communication in the organisation, and ways of working:

How will we decide who needs to know what?  We don't want to set ourselves the challenge of telling everybody everything, so how will we decide who needs to know what information, as we make decisions and pass around updates?

We might start with the questions, "who will be affected by this, who needs to be consulted – and who might want to know?"

Then we can explore how we will share that information.  Does this warrant a meeting or telephone call with a person?  Can we send out a mass email?

Who will take responsibility for ensuring that communication is sent – and maybe even received, understood and actioned?

What about when the whole team can't attend a meeting.  What follow up communication is expected?

When things are miscommunicated, or there are reports of a lack of communication, how will the team respond?

## Personal Reflection Notes Space

What issues with communication have you seen come up with your team? Have you noticed that classic dialogue in meetings – "yes I agree with Gill, but…" or people just take it in turns to say what they think about a topic without building on or referring to what others have said? This is perfectly normal and sadly, a very ineffective use of time.

How could you introduce questions into your meetings to keep people on one track of thought at a time? This is where the Six Thinking Hats might be useful. Try asking these questions and making sure people only answer the question asked before you move onto the next hat.

### Positive
What is good about this idea?
What are the benefits of this approach?

### Critical
What is not so good about this?
What are the risks?

### Creative
What could we do to make this better?
What new ideas could grow out of what we have already discussed?

### Data
What information do we already have to help us make a decision?
What further information do we need to make a decision about this?

### Intuitive
We've talked rationally about this, now let's just acknowledge that we'll each have an emotional or intuitive reaction to the idea as well. How do you feel about it / what does your gut tell you?

### Facilitation
What have we agreed?
What will happen next?

**Personal Reflection Notes Space**

Along similar lines to communication challenges, a leader's vulnerability and approach to feedback also has a significant impact on a team. Consider these questions:

How comfortable are you giving positive feedback to your team – and others?

How comfortable are you giving constructive feedback to your team – and others?

How comfortable are you receiving positive feedback from your team – and others?

How comfortable are you receiving constructive feedback from your team – and others?

If you are going to build a great team, encourage people to demonstrate the values agreed, stick to the goals defined and communicate well, you will need to be good at giving and receiving feedback.

Talking about all of this with your team will show your authenticity – you're being open and showing the team something of who you are. This can only be a positive when it is used to encourage that same openness from the rest of the team – and ultimately, work together to be more effective.

The key message here is that we often look at a team and wonder how to make the team better. We're challenging you to start with you. When you want to build trust, the first step is to be the vulnerable one. We trust people who are honest, own up to their shortcomings and then focus on making things better.

## Personal Reflection Notes Space

You have been on a journey from understanding the different aspects of teamwork, the preferences people have and their advantages and drawbacks. You've looked at how you can agree clear goals, values and ways of communicating with the team, and explored your role within it.

Take some time now to reflect on your overall learning and consider your next steps. We find this form of coaching works really well when you write out your answers and imagine someone asking you the questions. You then get the benefit of the thinking space and time you need, with the appropriate questions to lead you to action.

## Personal Reflection Notes Space

What have been your key learning points?

How might you be thinking differently about teamwork as a result of your learning?

What difference will that make for you when you're working with teams in future?

## Personal Reflection Notes Space

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What are the first actions you will take to apply this learning in your current context? Keep these quite small so you can achieve them in one meeting – otherwise you could end up with vague, lofty goals that are difficult to achieve.

How committed are you to doing these things, on a scale of 1-10 where 1 is not at all and 10 is definitely?

Why didn't you choose a lower number? This would suggest you are somewhat committed to taking action, so what are your reasons for trying something new?

What could stop you from taking these next steps you have committed to? Often it is only ourselves getting in our way – through the busy-ness of everyday work and the fear of getting it wrong.

How will you overcome those obstacles?

Who will you talk to about these actions you have set for yourself? Could you ask them to hold you to account for trying something different and reflecting on the learning?

**Personal Reflection Notes Space**

**Personal Reflection Notes Space**

## Further reading and research

### Edward de Bono

The multi million-copy bestseller Six Thinking Hats by Edward de Bono, author of Lateral Thinking and I Am Right You Are Wrong, teaches you how to run better meetings and make better decisions.

Meetings are a crucial part of all our lives, but too often they go nowhere and waste valuable time. In Six Thinking Hats, Edward de Bono shows how meetings can be transformed to produce quick, decisive results every time.
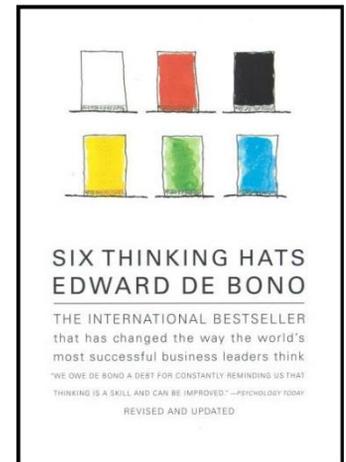
### Patrick Lencioni

Lencioni covers four steps to a healthy business: Build a cohesive leadership team; Create clarity; Over communicate clarity and Reinforce clarity. Through examples of his own experiences and others', he addresses the behaviours of a cohesive team, peer–to–peer accountability, office politics and bureaucracy and strategy, and how all organisations should strive to make people's lives better.
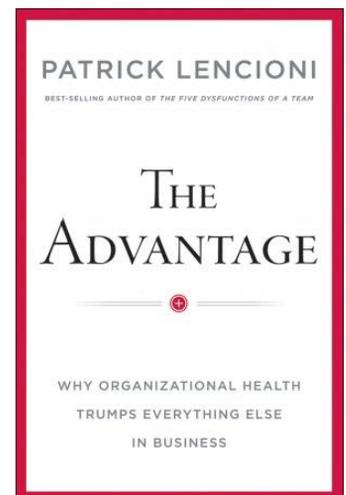
## What do we do?

We're a team of business psychologists who help companies select, develop and engage people to be at their best. Whatever your challenge with recruitment, succession, engagement, retention, learning and development, we can help.

We look at things with a fresh perspective and focusing on people at their best has lead to new ideas on how we recruit, develop and manage people – in our own team and for our clients. Backed up by our research, we see the benefits of taking a more values-centred and positive approach to everything we do.

Feel free to get in touch with us to find out how we can help you Select, Develop and Engage your people.

Steve Weller, CEO Uswitch

Totem took the time to really understand (our) culture, flex to our needs and continuously improve the programme - reflecting our own agile principles. I highly recommend working with them.

A few more of our great friends...

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