

Group dynamics

What is the secret behind really successful teams? This is a question Christian Jacobsson, a psychologist, has researched in great detail. He is now helping the Volvo Group to succeed with team development.

TEXT MARIA SKÖLD PHOTO SÖREN HÅKANLIND

IN RECENT YEARS, interest in group psychology has exploded and there is currently a great deal of knowledge about what makes a group of people high performers. At the same time, however, the research results have found it difficult to impact working lives.

"This is strange, as companies are facing increasingly complex challenges that require large-scale collaboration. We are going to see more and more teams in the future. Jobs that are done alone can be automated, while the tasks that require collaboration will remain," explains Christian Jacobsson.

For the past three years, he has been working as a consultant to the Volvo Group to increase its knowledge and understanding of the factors that create a culture of collaboration. On behalf of the Volvo Group University, he is training co-workers who are going to be facilitators and help teams develop.

Christian Jacobsson thinks that everyone who works in teams would benefit from a little basic knowledge of group psychology. First and foremost, he wants everyone to understand the importance of collaboration. There is less stress, sick leave and conflict in groups that are good at collaborating, where everyone feels respected.



5 KEYS TO SUCCESS

- ▶ Formulate common targets that are easy to understand
- ▶ Everyone in the group has clearly defined roles in relation to the targets
- ▶ Open, honest, prestige-free communication
- ▶ Everyone takes responsibility for the big picture and shares leadership
- ▶ If possible, the group should not have more than eight members

It is also relatively easy for companies to create the right conditions for teams to succeed.

"The research is clear. The most important thing for a group to be effective is that it has easily comprehensible, common targets. This then enables the group to manage itself based on the targets. The second most important factor is to clarify each individual's role in relation to the targets," says Christian Jacobsson.

Sometimes he sees the label of "team" applied to a group of people who do not actually have



Christian Jacobsson has trained 40 facilitators all over the world. They have the chance to both study current research and learn how to work practically with questionnaire analyses and development strategies.

DEVELOPING HIGH-PERFORMING TEAMS

WHAT? Since 2015, the Volvo Group University has been running the Developing High-Performing Teams programme at the Leadership & Management Academy.

FOR WHOM? Every kind of group that is looking to develop can apply to the programme and is then allocated its own facilitator. More information is available at Volvo Group Navigator. You can also contact Anna Elfversson, who is responsible for the programme, at anna.elfversson@volvo.com

HOW? The programme begins with the participants completing a questionnaire comprising 60 questions, the Group Development Questionnaire (GDQ). They then spend a day with their facilitator to receive feedback and discuss the results. They are helped to formulate the group's strengths and weaknesses and the steps they need to take to be an effective team. Together, they also formulate their targets going forward. Six months later, they complete a follow-up questionnaire which they spend half a day discussing.

a common target. In this context, he says it is wrong to call them a team.

"A team is not created by having a joint manager. A team is made up of people with common tasks. A team is characterised by members who need one another to realise their targets."

THE MODEL THE Volvo Group is using is based on the research conducted by Professor Susan Wheelan from the USA. Christian Jacobsson describes the method as easy to understand and viable all over the world.

"The definition of effective collaboration does not differ from one country to another. In every part of the world of which I have experience, it has been important to have clearly defined,

effective targets rather than having one manager who decides everything. It may, however, be more difficult to implement this at a workplace if the culture in the rest of society is extremely authoritarian," explains Christian Jacobsson.

Focusing too heavily on the individual can also create problems. Many companies look at the individuals they have employed and move them around, hoping that they will achieve great things in the organisation, regardless of where they find themselves.

"For a long time, interest focused on developing individuals, while groups were simply expected to function effectively. This is naturally the wrong approach. More and more people are starting to realise what groups can achieve if they are given the right conditions." ☺