



High Performance Teams: The Foundations of a Flourishing School

“Accomplishing the maximum impact on student learning depends on teams of teachers working together...” *John Hattie*

Teams In Schools: Why They Matter

A Flourishing School is a place where every student can learn and grow to their maximum capacity and every staff member has the capacity to reach and teach ALL of the students in their care. This by definition means we must seek to not only maximise the capacity of each student in terms of both wellbeing and learning but also maximise the capacity of staff in a similar manner.

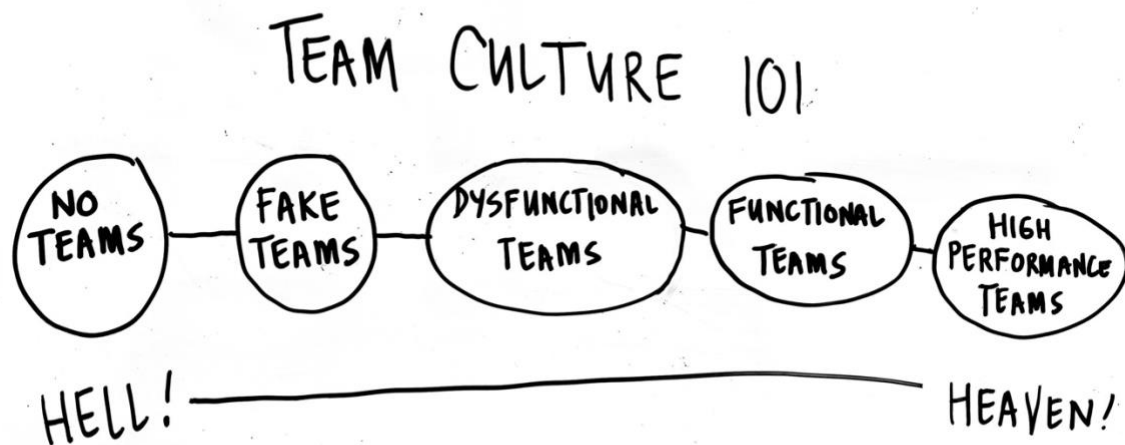
As John Hattie points out, it is ‘teams’ of teachers working together effectively which maximise the impact on student learning. When teams of teachers are working together in High Performance Teams they have the capacity to achieve extraordinary results with their students AND also the capacity to give and receive high levels of support and feedback among their peers.

It is this High Performance Teams environment that maximises teacher capacity to optimise student learning. When capacity is maximised, efficacy is enhanced (Efficacy = ‘*The capacity for producing a desired result or effect.*’) Thus, the shared experiences

of teachers working in High Performance Teams improves their level of Collective Teacher Efficacy – the single largest factor influencing student achievement with an effect size of 1.57.

However, it is not just ‘teams’ of teachers working together effectively that creates a Flourishing School. It is also the ‘teams’ of non-teaching staff and leadership teams that also need to work as High Performance Teams in order to maximise their capacity to fulfil their roles and in doing so maximise the efficacy of the school thus becoming a Flourishing School. The linchpin in this situation encompasses ALL ‘Teams’ within a school.

Team Culture: Heaven, Hell or Somewhere in Between?



‘Pete, let me tell you how it really works around here’ whispered one of the more experienced teachers sitting next to me as the meeting drew to a close... “because we may be a team by ‘name’ but we’re not a team by ‘nature’...”

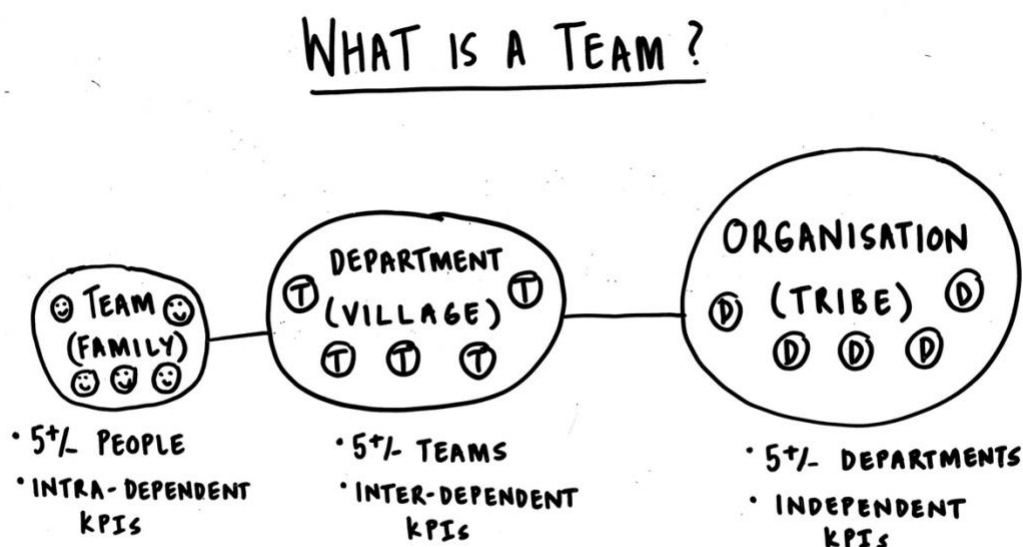
After the room was emptied and we were sitting alone she continued... *“They say we’re one big team – all working together but this is just rhetoric – all talk, no substance. When we get to meet together each month it’s in these big groups where the leaders ‘tell us’ what we’re doing right and wrong – we never get to discuss our own issues in smaller groups unless we’re chatting in the car park at the end of the day or meeting in someone’s office or at the coffee shop down the road during lunch breaks...”* It was quite clear from this teacher’s feedback that the ‘teams’ they were in were too big, not meeting often enough, and when they did get to meet there was not enough support nor collective problem solving...

This story highlights an important starting point to consider in the journey of building high Performance Teams in schools. The ‘team culture’ or way in which the word ‘team’ is used to describe various groups within a school is either a blessing or a curse,

a cultural indicator of heaven or hell - depending upon the extent to which it is used to identify and describe actual 'teams' with clearly defined boundaries and activity cycles, or simply some jargon or a euphemism for various groups of staff.

Defining A Team: The Role of Family, Village & Tribe

When it comes to understanding what a team actually is, anthropology provides some excellent insights. According to Professor Nigel Nicholson, humans have spent 4 million years existing as 'hunter-gatherers' which have 'hard-coded' many traits and instincts into our personalities. Autonomy, egalitarianism and sharing are foundations of hunter-gather communities. These communities existed in family groups connected together in village groups inside wider tribal networks. Family groups were the smallest units who worked together continuously to provide food and shelter. Village groups were larger units who worked together regularly to provide safety and security and coordinate efforts in larger herding and harvesting tasks. Tribal groups were the largest groups who worked together intermittently to reinforce wider cultural, language and social norms needed to maintain stability and order in the region.



Modern organisations use the Family, Village Tribe structures by designating Teams as Family units of 3-7 members, Villages as 3-5 teams working together as a division or department and Tribes as the over-arching Organisations. In an organisation such as a school, family units are easily understood as teams such as cohort or year level teams in primary schools and faculty teams* in high schools (*larger faculties being broken into smaller units of teams assigned to specific cohorts or curriculum specialisations). Villages would be divisions of a school such as Upper, Middle and Junior School and Tribes would simply reflect the Whole School as an organisation.

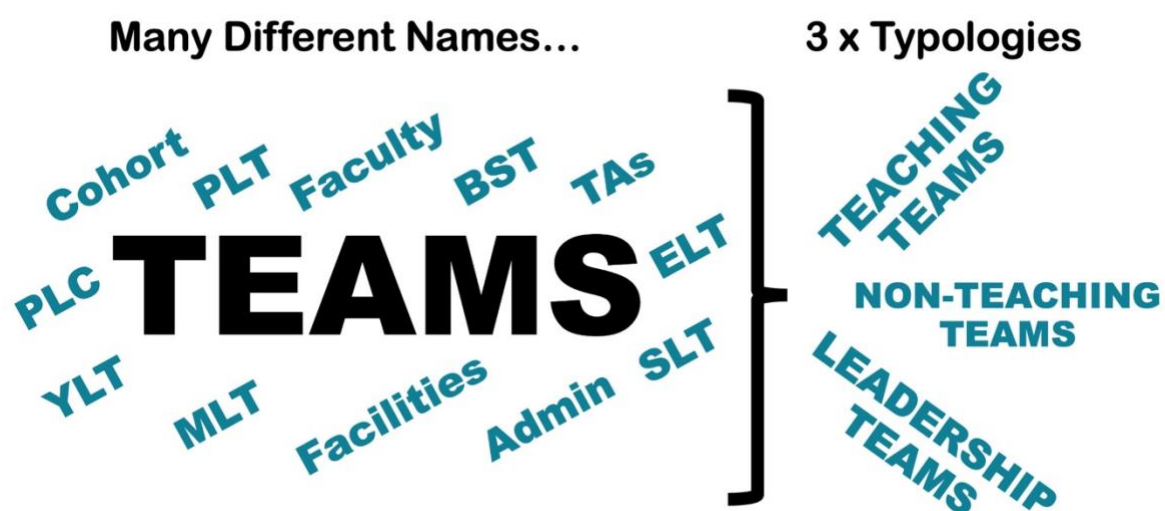
Team Size: How Big Should A Team Be?

Whilst one definition of team size based on anthropological ideas suggest 3-7 people as the ideal size for teams, there are other points of research to consider when finding the ideal number. Firstly, effort of input research by Maximilian Ringelmann (b 1861) found that when pulling on a rope more people was better than less in generating combined force – however any more than 5 people pulling at the same time created a negative effect where individuals lowered their actual effort – assuming they did not have to try as hard given the wider efforts of the larger group (AKA Social Loafing). Thus, the number 5 becomes important...

Five is also the ideal number in terms of research on the maximum beneficial social interactions in groups (i.e., enough interaction to maximise collective knowledge without too much interaction to become overwhelming or distracting). Team member interaction satisfaction data also suggests 4.6 (rounded up to 5) is the statistically optimum group size. At a practical level teams of only 3 or 4 could split/unite too easily causing 'groupthink' risks and/ or unproductive conflict. Groups of between 5-7 people provides the best opportunity to mix up the interactions and alliances to ensure a more robust debate and a wider mix of inputs and a reliably healthier dynamic.

Teams In Schools: Team Types & Terminology

Schools have a vast array of different terms used to describe teams which vary not only across nationalities and jurisdictions but also between schools within the same regions and networks. Names such as 'cohort teams', 'PLCs', 'PLTs' etc. all refer to teams of teachers whilst names such as 'ELT', 'SLT', 'MLT' etc. refer to teams of school leaders and 'Admin', 'Facilities' & 'TAs' etc. refer to non-teaching teams. Thus the 3 team typologies that need to be understood and differentiated for in a High Performance Teams environment are 1. Teaching Teams, 2. Non-Teaching Teams and 3. Leadership Teams.



The School Context: Teaching Teams vs. Improvement Groups

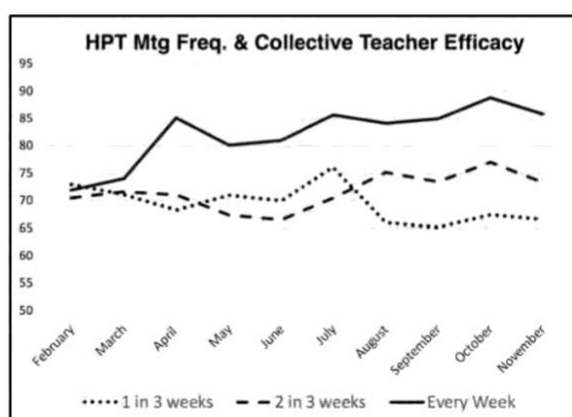
It is also important to ensure that in a school context '[Teaching Teams](#)' are not confused with 'Improvement Groups'. In some school settings where there is only limited meeting time available, teaching team meetings are too infrequent for optimal performance as they are scheduled in cycle with other group meetings. This lowers collective efficacy and needs to be addressed by more efficient design of improvement group and general staff meeting strategy which will, in turn, increase the frequency of teaching team meetings (see breakout box).

A Word About Meeting Frequency

Both the literature and data (see Graph) seems pretty clear about weekly 60 minute meetings being optimal for teaching teams. However, in Australian public schools there are constraints around how many meetings teachers are required to attend each week. Often this leads to team meeting schedules being compromised to fit in other required staff meetings etc.

Where this occurs teaching team meetings should be scheduled at least back-to-back to enable continuity between meetings before other meetings disrupt the cycle. The Table below shows an example of how

to maximise teaching team meeting time in an Australian state high school and primary school context where one hour per week is the maximum time provisioned for teacher meeting activity of any type.



Example School Term Meeting Cycle – Normal vs High Performance*

Weeks	60 min Meeting Cycle (Normal)	60 min Meeting Cycle at High Performance School*
1	General Staff	General Staff (with Improvement Group breakout)
2	Teaching Team	Teaching Team
3	Improvement Group	Teaching Team
4	General Staff	Teaching Team
5	Teaching Team	General Staff (with Improvement Group breakout)
6	Improvement Group	Teaching Team
7	General Staff	Teaching Team
8	Teaching Team	Teaching Team
9	Improvement Group	General Staff (with Improvement Group breakout)
10	General Staff	Teaching Team
	Team Time Per Term = 3 hours	Team Time Per Term = 7 hours

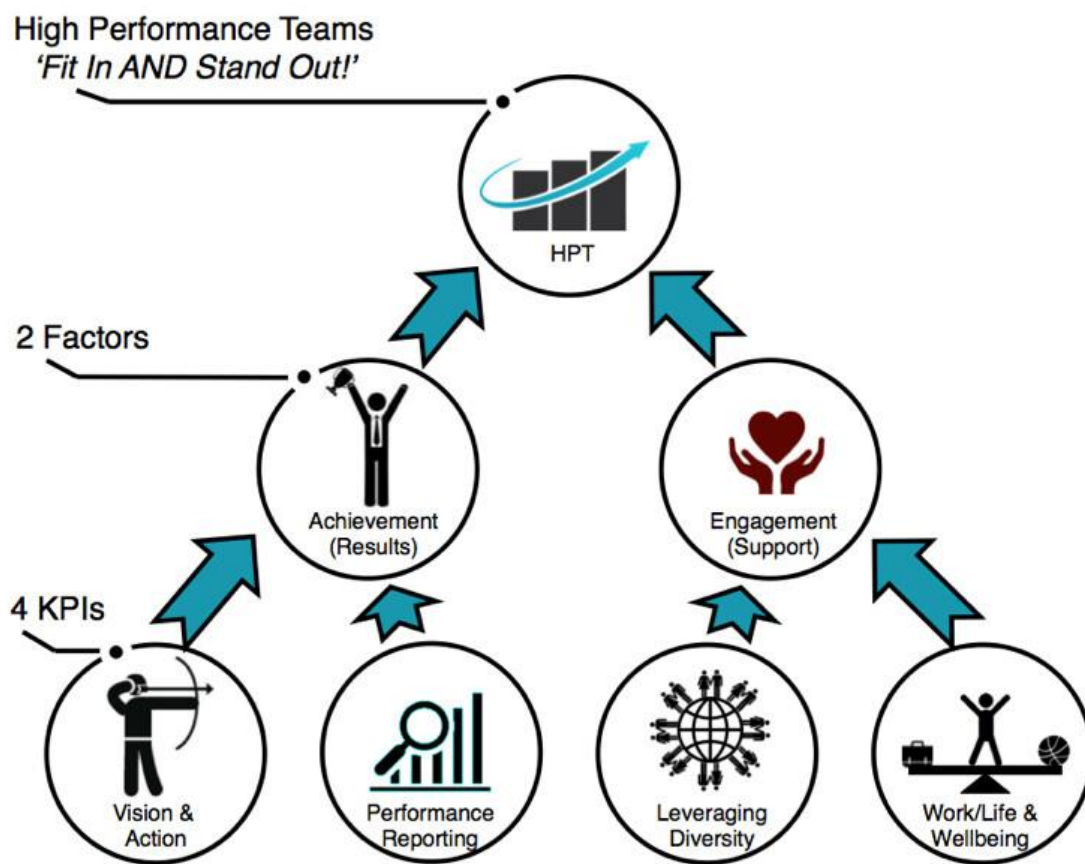
**Where timetabling permits weekly 60 minute teaching team meetings is optimal but current time restricted schools still achieve at least 7 hours per term within available resources.*

What is a High Performance Team?

“High Performance Teams both ‘Fit In’ and ‘Stand Out’. They ‘Fit In’ by having high levels of Team Engagement and they ‘Stand Out’ by having high levels of Team Achievement’ Pete Stebbins

Now that we’ve got a clear picture on what ‘Teams’ are in schools we can ask the question: What is a ‘High Performance Team’?

High Performance Teams are the key to maximising the Collective Efficacy of teachers (and all staff) and in turn increase their ability to positively impact on student learning. As you can see in the HPT Framework diagram outlined below, there are two distinct factors that define High Performance Teams – Achievement and Engagement and beneath these factors are the 4 key performance indicators (KPIs) necessary for success.



High Team Achievement is defined as the ability to consistently meet and/or exceed the team’s specific goals and targets and addressing the two KPIs of: (1) Vision and Action and (2) Performance Reporting is crucial for success. High Team Engagement is the ability to generate positive team dynamics to create enduring supportive working relationships and enable innovation drawing upon the cumulative knowledge of the team. Within the factor of Engagement we find the remaining two KPIs that need to be addressed: (3) Leveraging Diversity and (4) Work/Life & Wellbeing.

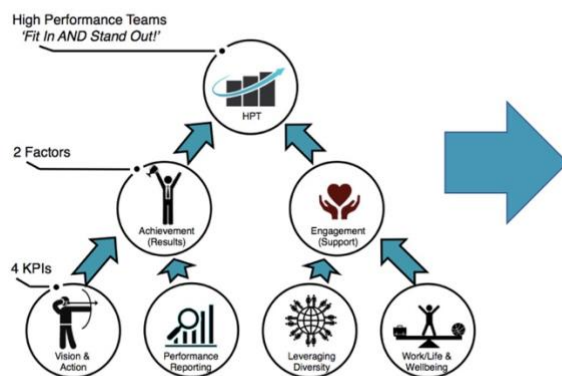
When Teams work together as High Performance Teams their success across these 4 KPIs leads to higher levels of Job Satisfaction, Performance Feedback, Peer Support and Work/Life Satisfaction (we'll show you the outcomes for students shortly...) which boosts their collective efficacy and their ability to flourish!

Team Systems & The HPT Framework

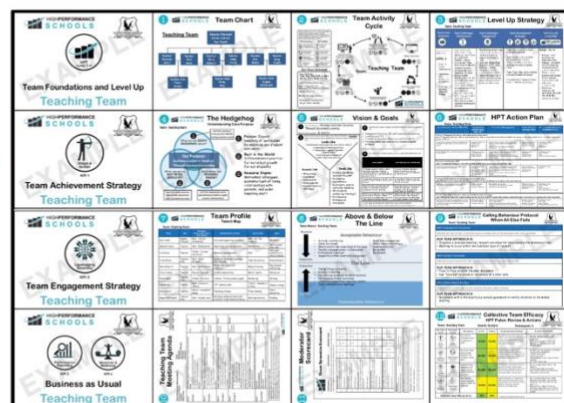
You do not rise to the level of your goals. You fall to the level of your systems. James Clear

Another great way to further understand High Performance Teams is to review the underlying systems they have for each of the 4 KPIs. You can see in the diagram below a 'Team System Map' (aka Team Data Wall) showing the artefacts and tools for each of the key elements of the HPT Team System. We will unpack this further now using a Teaching Team System example. You can see the Non-Teaching Team and Leadership Team System Examples ([HERE](#)).

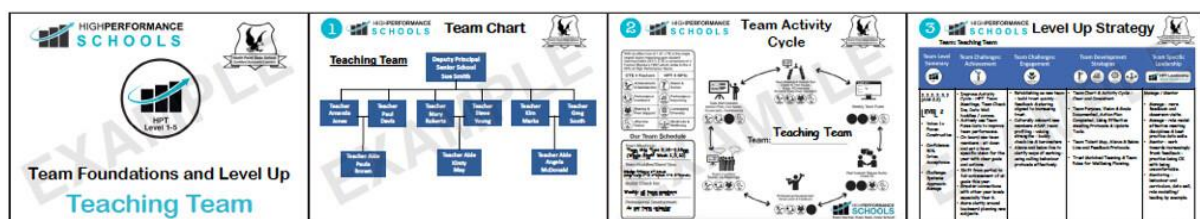
HPT Framework



Team Systems



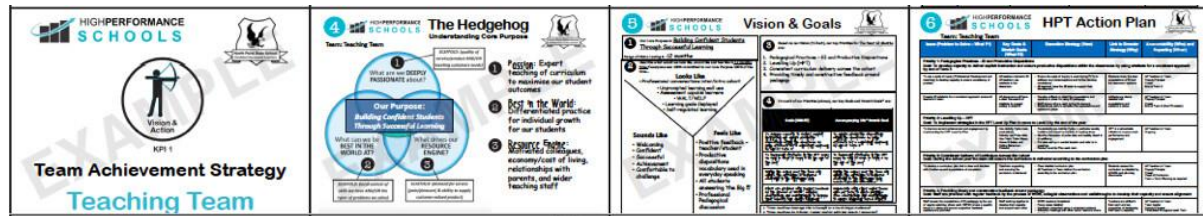
Team Foundations



Team Role Chart: The team role chart outlines the structure within the team as well as the role that each team member plays in contributing to the team's overarching goals. **Team Activity Cycle:** The BAU Activity Cycle captures the key team interaction processes. Clarifying the Activity Cycle ensures that 'team time' is optimised (not too little and not too much) and strong lines of communication ensures no key message slips through the cracks. **Team Level Up Strategy:** The Level Up Strategy captures the team's own rating of their performance based on the 5 Levels of High Performance Teams as well as the steps that the team believes are needed

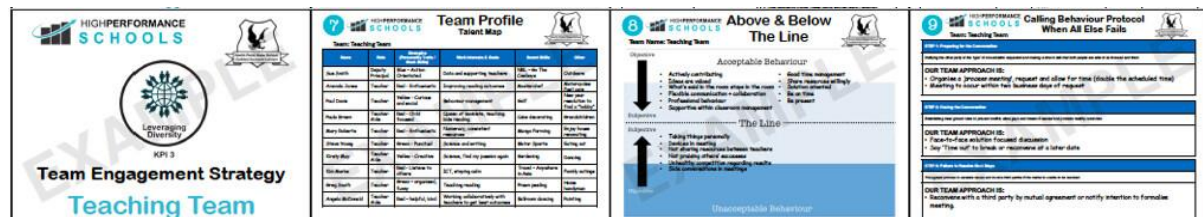
to be taken for the team to Level Up. You can assess you teams Level of Performance [\(HERE\)](#).

Team Achievement



Core Purpose Hedgehog: The Hedgehog captures the core reason that the team exists through crystallising what that they are (a) passionate about, (b) want to be the best in the world at, as well as (c) the drivers of the team's resource engine. **Vision & Goals:** A good Vision and Goals document captures the team's short to mid-term Vision and Goals – starting with a Y Chart of Vision leading into SMART and Stretch Goals. **Team Action Plan:** The Team Action Plan captures the details of how the team will achieve its ambitious goals. Regularly referring back to Team Action Plans ensures that all team members keep the most important priorities at front of mind.

Team Engagement



Team Profile/Talent Map: The Team Talent Map captures each team members' personality type and interests. This enables all team members to be mindful of the diversity within the team minimizing conflict and enhancing character strengths. **Above and Below the Line Chart:** The Above and Below the Line Protocol captures the team's agreed standards for team behaviours. **Calling Behaviour Protocol:** The Calling Behaviour Protocol outlines the team's agreed process for addressing more significant behavioural concerns between team members.

Business as Usual (AKA Meetings & Metrics)



Team Meeting Agenda & Moderator Score Card: The HPT meeting agenda provides a clear structure within the meeting, the special role of meeting moderator controls team dynamics. At the end of each meeting the moderator provides feedback

to the group to ensure that they have adhered to the meeting's ground rules. **Team Pulse Scorecard:** In order to 'grow' Collective Efficacy in teams we need to find a way the teaching team can regularly measure it so that they can then regularly manage it. This is what the Team Pulse System does - find out more [HERE](#).

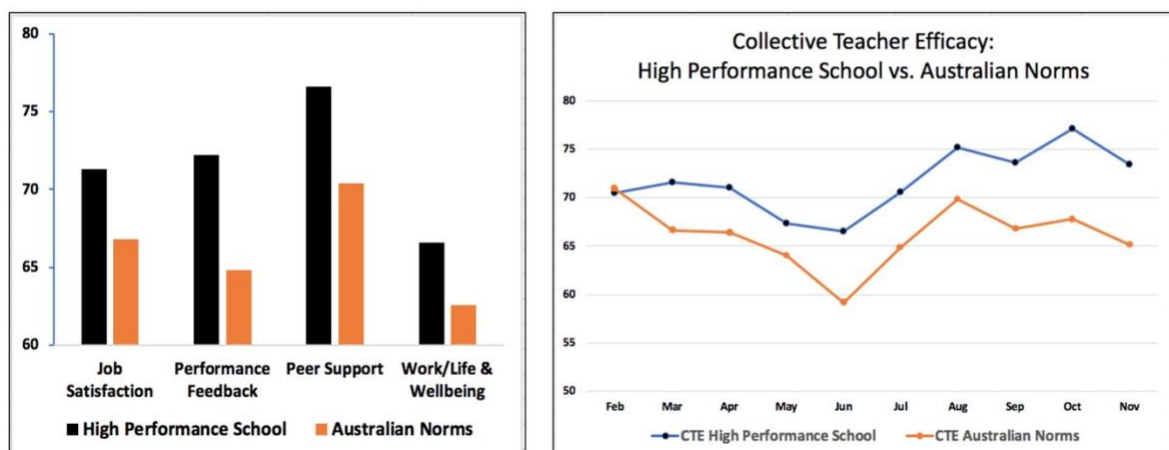
Staff & Students Flourishing: The Impact of Building HPTs

The great thing about building High Performance Teaching Teams is that there is plenty of real-world evidence that this approach maximises Collective Teacher Efficacy as well as significantly improving student outcomes, staff wellbeing, and parent and community satisfaction with the school.

Staff Flourishing: Collective Efficacy Outcomes

High Performance Teams use the Team Pulse System to measure and manage their collective efficacy in real time. You can see in the table below that Schools which have High Performance Teams have much higher levels of overall collective efficacy as well as higher levels of each of the four subscale measures.

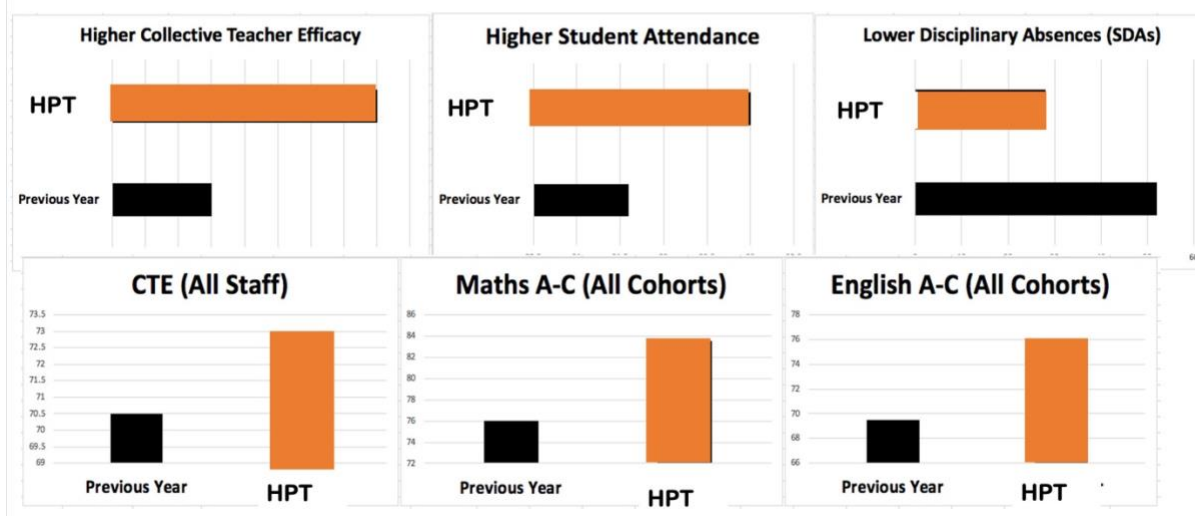
HPT & Staff Impact



Students Flourishing: Academic Growth, Attendance & Behaviour

As you can see in the next charts which examine the impact of High Performance Teams on student attendance, disciplinary incidents and academic improvement, HPT clearly has much wider benefits on a range of important student outcomes.

HPT & Student Impact



Bringing It All Together

It has been well established in research that ‘teams’ of teachers working together effectively maximise the impact on student learning. When teams of teachers are working together in High Performance Teams they have the capacity to achieve extraordinary results with their students AND also the capacity to give and receive high levels of support and feedback among their peers. To maximise the effectiveness of any school we need to recognise and invest in ALL teams of ALL types ensuring our non-teaching teams and leadership teams are also working together as High Performance Teams.

After all, a Flourishing School is a place where ALL teams are able to work as High Performance Teams. Where the leadership teams and non-teaching teams develop high levels of collective efficacy – maximising their capacity to positively impact upon those they serve and where our teaching teams develop high levels of collective teacher efficacy maximising their capacity to reach and teach ALL of the students in their care.

Take some time now to reflect on your school's Team Strategy:

1. What is team culture like at the moment - is the word ‘team’ simply some jargon or a reference to an important organisational strategy to maximise collective efficacy?
2. Are team sizes enabling meaningful and effective work practices or should some teams be broken into smaller sub-groups at various times to promote more effective feedback and working relationships?
3. Are your teams working as High Performance Teams and do they have strong team systems to maximise Achievement and Engagement?

4. What are the key measures and metrics you rely on to evaluate the effectiveness of your school's Team Strategy?

These reflective questions will help you identify the strengths and challenges within your current team strategy and enable you to take another step forward in building High Performance Teams across your school so all staff and students can flourish!

Dr Pete Stebbins PhD