



## Top Teams

### *First Practitioners Roundtable Brief*

Prof. Dr. Winfried Ruigrok

Dean Executive School of Management, Technology and Law (ES-HSG),  
Director Research Institute for International Management (FIM-HSG)  
and Chairman Competence Center for Top Teams

On November 25<sup>th</sup> the Competence Center for Top Teams at FIM-HSG hosted its First Practitioners Roundtable bringing together participants with backgrounds in consulting, banking, coaching, sports and academia. The overarching objective was to initiate an ongoing dialogue in the area of high-performance top teams, all the while bridging the worlds of research and practice.

Four experts represented the practice world, all with deep experience in top teams. Jens Heinemann is a Berlin entrepreneur and top management coach who builds CEO teams into high-performing teams. Dr. Armin Timmermann leverages 40 years at McKinsey and private equity investment experience to establish, often on the fly, top teams able to meet the most demanding challenges of specific clients. Dr. Thomas Zweifel, a renowned leadership expert and accomplished author addresses a variety of top team challenges all over the globe, including the thorniest of diversity and cross-cultural clashes. Anja Peter's 25 years as a banking executive gives her deep exposure into executive training and top team challenges in the finance industry.

All practitioners shared their approaches to high-performance top teams. Jens models team relationships with a high-powered 'diamond' metaphor, which emphasizes building strong ties based on genuine two-way communication between team members. One of his key points is that "innovation starts by listening."

Thomas showed the importance of 'context' and conceptualized this as the super-ego of the organization, very often constraining action. Firms aiming for transformation need to be aware of context and top management team biases and narratives. It is tautological that "we can't solve problems by using the same thinking that brought about the problems." As a result, top teams need to creatively work on designing new context for their firms. This post-modern, constructionist approach to top team management became another unique takeaway of the day.

Armin's emphasis was on trust, which had been a leitmotiv during the discussions. Hard to earn, trust can result in incredible returns. But it requires a mindset, courageous personal initiative and even measuring instruments. Practical examples were supplied that brought to life the trust construct, as well as Armin's capacity as a most generous mentor.

The playful note was supplied by Anja; to the amazement of participants she delivered her messages through an installation made up of 'surprise chocolate eggs'. She went on to supply a story about the treasures and competencies hidden in people that provoked thinking and discussion long after the sweet taste of chocolate had faded.

Winfried Ruigrok then brought in an academic perspective. He argued that research appears inconclusive about the link between diversity and performance. However this may be the result of the fact that many studies address diversity in teams in a "non-diverse" way, i.e. typically based on one demographic dimension. Work at the University of St. Gallen suggests that managing diversity in a multi-dimensional way (i.e. along different demographic dimensions at the same time) tends to produce unambiguous and positive results. Moreover, at the end of the day it is not diversity itself but *managing* diversity that makes the difference

At the closing of the roundtable the high energy levels in the room were a fair testimony of the deep exchanges that occurred throughout the morning. The practitioners and CCTT gained new insights into very practical challenges of top teams. Approaches to effectively master these challenges were shared and critically evaluated ... as a team.

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