



Optimising team performance for a critical government initiative

The *Murray-Darling Basin Plan 2012* (Cth) (Basin Plan) is a water reform initiative being implemented by the Commonwealth and state governments. Enacted in 2012, the Basin Plan is intended to address the overallocation of water in the Murray-Darling Basin. The Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) provides advice on planning and reporting processes, water planning requirements, and considerations for the Basin states and the Commonwealth government when using or allocating water across the Basin.

The MDBA is required to conduct 10-yearly reviews of the Basin Plan. The first 10-yearly review is currently scheduled for 2026 and will require a significant amount of preparatory work. The Basin Plan Review team has been established to settle the scope and work plan for the review project. They are under pressure with limited current resources and funding. As a relatively new team, they need to align internally as well as connect with other MDBA teams and external stakeholders, and deliver some early wins.

Challenge

To address these challenges, the program director recognised that it was a pivotal time to galvanise the team's ways of working if they were going to achieve the project's goals. Specifically, the team needed to increase their capability in the area of stakeholder management in order to create alignment (with both internal and external stakeholders) and momentum in an environment where multiple perspectives and divergent needs were "getting louder".



Approach

Escient, a consultancy firm, was brought in to support the development of a highly calibrated and self-aware team, so they could continue to move forward on key objectives and align stakeholders.

Four key strategies were defined to ensure that the team was supported to operate as efficiently and effectively as possible:

1. **Build rapport by understanding** the communication and work preferences of self and others.
2. **Increase knowledge of how to communicate** and work effectively with diverse stakeholder groups.
3. **Clarify individual and team contribution**, informing role clarity and responsibilities.
4. **Align individual strengths** with team and programme goals.

Due to its successful exposure amongst other MDBA senior leaders, the Team Management Profile (TMP) was chosen as the preferred psychometric tool to address these outcomes.

Each of the six team members completed a TMP and then attended a 30 minute debrief session with Escient Principal Consultant Mark Winter. This was in preparation for a full-team, in-person half-day workshop.

Outcome

The individual profile debriefs gave each team member a great insight into their own communication and work preferences. The next step was to practically apply this knowledge to strategies to help team members work more effectively, both intra-team and with the wider MDBA.

In the months after the workshop, as new staff joined the team, they also received a profile and debrief. This ensured alignment and self-awareness was maintained as team membership changed.

In a situation where resources were limited and communication was critical, the TMP proved to be an impactful framework for team members to enhance their capability to manage stakeholder groups effectively. With the support of skilled facilitation, the team developed rapport and understanding with each other, improved inter- and intra-team communication and leveraged their diverse perspectives and ways of working together to achieve high performance.

Feedback

"Thank you again for the incredible session in Adelaide and all the work and discussions in the lead up to it. I can see people being strategic in how they engage with each other/plan meetings so the change is already happening, and it also really helped us with our multi year work planning."