

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Team Building through Trust Building

In a recent survey and research report from the Center for Creative Leadership, 91% of respondents agreed that “Teams are central to organizational success.” Teams are heavily relied upon in today’s business environment and are being used as much to drive change as to generate current results.

But what happens when your team lacks a sense of trust? Team members are likely to:

- Fail to recognize and benefit from one another’s skills and experiences
- Be reluctant to ask for assistance or provide constructive feedback
- Hesitate to offer help or go beyond minimal expectations
- Conceal their problems and mistakes from one another
- Jump to conclusions about the intentions or aptitudes of others
- Waste time and energy focusing on appearances
- Display jealousy or hold grudges
- Dread meetings and look for reasons to avoid spending time together

Many experts have written about team dynamics in the workplace, how to build effective teams and why some teams work and others don’t. While there may be disagreement in some areas, almost all say that to build a top-performing team, you must start by establishing open lines of communication and building trust. Research has shown that trust is the foundation for

team effectiveness (Lencioni, 2002). Without trust, many important things are likely to be left unsaid, and the “politicking” that often occurs can undermine the efforts of the whole team.

TRUST BUILDING

Ask anyone who works on a team if they trust the others on their team, and they will probably say “yes.” However, if you probe a little, you may get a “yes, *but* only within certain parameters.”

To help structure and strengthen the team members’ interrelationships, team building usually includes trust-building exercises that focus on being more comfortable with one another, exchanging new information and perhaps swapping some personal stories. This process typically involves shared activities and exercises that require each member to trust each of their teammates. The team-building facilitator may sometimes also use “personal styles” inventories as assessments. However, there is no consensus among facilitators as to whether using these “style” indicators has any lasting or meaningful effect on a team’s performance (Marquardt, 2004).

To produce lasting benefits, especially for a team that has been together for some time, it is important to use a scientific, validated and reliable instrument that measures many qualities more complex than just “style.” An in-depth personality assessment, such as the Caliper Profile, generates a much

deeper and more detailed conversation about how each member of a team is likely to behave, interact, communicate and solve problems, as well as influence or potentially conflict with others on the team.

THE ADVANTAGES OF USING PERSONALITY ASSESSMENTS

The absence of trust can keep team members from being candid with those around them. In-depth personality assessments provide insights into how each individual team member is “wired,” which helps everyone understand the reasons behind someone’s particular style and why people behave the way they do. And the benefit to each team member is three-fold: 1) a better understanding of themselves and their own behaviors; 2) a better understanding of fellow team members from the same objective perspective, and; 3) a better ability to work together cooperatively and collaboratively.

1) Know Yourself

The first advantage of an objective personality assessment is a deeper and more detailed perception of yourself - who you are and why you behave the way you do in certain circumstances. You gain insights into your own strengths, developmental challenges and overall motivations, as well as specific examples of what is easy for you, what may take some work to change and what might always be a struggle.

For example, if you have a high level of urgency, the need to get things done quickly, combined with relatively low flexibility or empathy, you may not take the time to consider how your actions impact others. But armed with that information, you will know that when situations arise that require consensus and cooperation, you will need to work on being more patient and more open-minded, both with others and perhaps with yourself.

2) Understanding Others

Another major advantage to using an in-depth personality assessment is getting to know everyone on your team from this same vantage point. Knowing the strengths and limitations of each individual allows everyone to function at a higher level. Each person will then know what they need to do to support the whole team as well as what abilities they have that others may not. In addition, they will be aware of the areas in which they struggle and see how other team members can help them. Team members may soon begin to think, “Now that I know my colleagues better, what can I do to help them when we work together? And in what ways can they help me?”

For example, some people may come across as somewhat standoffish because they lack assertiveness and/or self-confidence, or they may be skeptical of other people’s intentions. On the other hand, they might simply prefer one-to-one interactions to group activities, or just be very independent. Not being perceived as highly sociable could be due to any combination of any of these factors. Knowing why someone’s style seems to be that of a “loner,” for example, may not only help that person, but also enable other team members to relate, interact and communicate more effectively.

3) Working Together

Building trust is about opening lines of communication so team assignments can be organized in such a way that everyone’s strengths are capitalized on and everyone’s weaknesses are minimized. (Weinstein & Sweeney, 2003). When the entire team operates from this balanced perspective, you will not be trying to reinvent or “change” anybody, turn someone into something they are not, or force people to do things that make them uncomfortable.

Instead, operating from a base of mutual respect, team members can open up their minds and hearts to ask meaningful questions to learn more about each other, rather than make perhaps unfounded assumptions and misjudge one another (Adams, 2004). In short, everyone is reassured that it is okay to be who they are—but now they have the shared knowledge and the teamwork tools to work together much more effectively.

TEAM BUILDING WITH LASTING IMPACT

Meaningful team building is never easy, but knowing that more productive working relationships will be the result makes it well worth the time and effort. As the people involved get to know themselves and the others on their team better, they often make some interesting discoveries. On an “all-star” team, for example, every individual may be a star player in their own right, but they may still not know how to work together toward a common goal (O’Kleefe, 1995). Especially at upper-management and executive levels, participants usually recognize that they got where they are by being who they are—but they may also find that they really aren’t team players by nature.

The team leader has a key role in creating a set of expectations for the whole team that outlines the behaviors required to meet performance standards. In addition, the team-building sessions will show people how to reach a consensus on a set of behavioral standards to which they can agree to be held accountable. At the same time, it should be made clear that team members are expected to follow certain protocols and rules of engagement. If they do not, infractions should be handled like any other performance issue. It is imperative that the team leader does not “give up” or choose not to deal with those who do not comply. Such issues must be recognized,

addressed and resolved. Doing nothing or ignoring the problem is simply not an option, as this will just bring down the rest of the team.

The team-building session facilitator's role is to guide each participant through the process of self-discovery and understand the dynamics of the other team members. At first, participants may be reluctant to discuss certain aspects of their personality assessment in front of their coworkers. The facilitator can help by pointing out beforehand that other team members probably already know them well enough that the results aren't likely to be a great surprise. An objective personality assessment just puts words to underlying thoughts and feelings that then become useful information for mutual understanding.

A broad-based, comprehensive personality assessment such as the Caliper Profile provides a much deeper understanding of yourself and your teammates in a much shorter time. And by keeping lines of communication open and coming to know those on your team as well as you know yourself, everyone will continue to benefit from the team-building session long after the exercises are finished and the games are over. ■

CALIPER'S APPROACH TO TEAM BUILDING

- Individual Assessments (Caliper Profile)
 - ▷ Personal insight and awareness
- Confidential Interviews
 - ▷ Gather different perspectives
 - ▷ Engage participants
- Team Survey
 - ▷ Determine level of functioning in key areas (goals, roles, communication, problem solving, trust, etc.)
- Agreement on Success Measures
 - ▷ What are we trying to accomplish?
 - ▷ How will we measure success?
- Meeting/Retreat Facilitation
 - ▷ Customized agenda and exercises based on the team's needs
- Follow-Up Reinforcement Activities
 - ▷ Team-Leader coaching
 - ▷ Skill-Building workshops
 - ▷ Action Learning
- Evaluation
 - ▷ What have we accomplished?
 - ▷ How has it benefited our organization?

RESOURCES

Adams, M. (2004), *Change Your Questions, Change Your Life: 7 Powerful Tools for Life and Work*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Lencioni, P. (2005), *Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Jossey-Bass.

Marquardt, M. (2004), *Optimizing the Power of Action Learning*, Davies-Black Publishing.

Martin, A. & Bal, V. (2006), "The State of Teams: A CCL Research Report"

O'Kleefe, A. (1995), "What Makes a Winning Team?" *Personal Selling Power*, Personal Selling Power Inc.

Weinstein, H. & Sweeney, P. (2003), "Building Peak Performance Teams," *Manage*, The American Management Association.