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“The Difference that makes the Difference”

I am often asked the question, what are the essential ingredients to an effective team? Through the years, although the country, cultures, scenarios and personalities change, the fundamental challenges do not. For instance, the desire for team members to want individual acclaim, instead of being lost in the crowd as ‘just another’ team member is common.

These findings are nothing new, given the societal celebration of individual accomplishment, which is thought to inspire the many to pursue similar feats of accomplishment. The irony is, it produces the very behaviour, that is contrary to promoting effective teamwork, if the priorities of the individual are routinely chosen, over that of the team.

“So, how do we get out of own way, reward and promote individual excellence, yet drive the behaviours that enhance teamwork and the associated benefits?”

Creating teams that the individual and the collective, both exceed their expectations and grow by being part of that team, can be very difficult. Symptomatic of these dual outcomes being achieved, is the amount of 'discretionary effort,' on display; (voluntary contribution, evidenced by team members coming in early and going home late, on a routine basis).

At the MS Impact Group, our primary objective, when working with teams today is, to create a repeatable process, that breeds success more often than not, regardless of the groups' makeup or location. Of the many facets involved in service of that objective, four stand out, which, although not exclusive are some of the hardest to create but produce extraordinary payback over the life cycle of a team in question.

Core facets of Team Effectiveness

1. **Universal Trust** - A level of trust that is distinguishable by the creation and sustainability of an environment, which enhances rather than detracts, when things become difficult. A type of trust that brings with it, structured intimacy between members, which facilitates conversations that cut to the heart of issues, regardless of differing of viewpoints. Trust that takes a tremendous amount of care and patience to create, as members can and must be open and honest, without concern of recrimination, or the potential for exposure. This can be referred to as 'vulnerability-based trust' in the work of the acclaimed author [Patrick Lencioni](#). The hardest part of its attainment being, accepting the notion of being vulnerable as a good idea! The leap of faith required for this first step is no easy feat. In the face of these barriers, the courage of those who would think and act differently, is not to be underestimated.
2. **Building upon Differences** - The differences of point of view of each team member respected by design and protected as an asset, allowing a multi-dimensional team thinking and team members interacting as 'known quantities' to each other. These attributes are a fundamental shift from many of the corrosive team dynamics we have witnessed - where whoever shouted loudest was considered first, their opinion disguised as fact, regardless of accuracy or appropriateness to the situation at hand. The quietest in the group, relegated to the least listened too, despite the distinct capability they were brought into the team for in the first place. This continuum of the desired behaviours become a barometer of the team success, particularly during moments of stagnation, where the need for new approaches and innovative thinking becomes all important.

3. **Uncovering Blind Spots** - This concept is exemplified in Edward Debono's "[Six thinking hats](#)", where the systematic multi-dimensional review of any one situation creates a three-hundred-and-sixty-degree view of possibilities. The principle being as important as the outcome; 'there is no one view which contains all the story'. It is the composite of multiple views which allows the depth, breadth, rate of change etc, of any one situation to be appreciated. By embracing this approach leveraging the fundamental nature and the distinct way the brain works. If challenged in the right way, producing different views, inspired by different thoughts, in order to change the very nature of the problem or situation being viewed.

4. **Team Leader Attributes** - The impact of the team leader, should never be underestimated. Done well, it includes adherence to a principle-based approach that endures, and that brings about innovative thinking, regardless of the pressure felt by the team. The demonstration of the behavioural skills and dexterity required to lead by example and not just words, is paramount. The importance of team leadership is never more apparent than in its absence. Be under no illusion, leadership is probably one of the most overused words with many definitions, given its mercurial nature and illusiveness. Yet it does not mean there are not ways to foster the very best of each other, by dealing with our frailties as well as the potential for greatness, if we are given environments which foster such outcomes, led by individuals, minded to do so.

Closing Thought

Given the reality of businesses today, (the pressure on results, under-resourcing, time constraints, etc.) stress becomes a fundamental consideration, all too often, the norm for many teams rather than the exception. Operating within this paradigm, bringing together talented individuals, and getting the best out of them, demands a systemic approach to collaborative thinking. All the while, preserving the very asset which is critical to the success of any business, the people charged with producing the results.

So, in this world of constant change and the desire to produce predictable outcomes that can be forecasted, the influence of a team leader looking for continuous improvement on previous performance, is paramount as a default attribute.

“Despite the inherent nature of these at times-opposing forces, tackling them as a strategic objective when creating the team, is one of the fundamental changes in approaches that makes the real difference over time”

End of Insight

