

Productivity = Your Team Being on the Same Page!

- Marcia Hughes, President, Collaborative Growth

*Until one is committed there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back, always ineffectiveness. . .
The moment one definitively commits oneself, then providence moves too.*
- W. H. Murray, During a Himalayan expedition

Commitment by your team to one another, their work product and your organization is a potent asset which brings benefits of clarity, prompt decision making and comfort in making needed changes. This is the third of five articles reviewing Patrick Lencioni's book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. We have discussed strategies for overcoming the first two dysfunctions -- lack of trust, and fear of conflict. In this issue of Collaborative Times we will consider his third, Lack of Commitment and focus on the positive - how your team can avoid or resolve challenges caused by lack of commitment. The two pitfalls Lencioni points out when commitment is low are the tendency to strive for unnecessary consensus and seeking too high a degree of certainty. Downsides when commitment is missing from team members include ambiguity, delay, risk aversion and paralysis by analysis.

First, let's revisit the first two dysfunctions to see how lack of trust and fear of conflict undermine the ability to commit. In this model the dysfunctions really need to be healed from the bottom up, and trust lies at the foundation of the pyramid. So much of our effectiveness as a team relies on our ability to be open with one another about what we feel and why, what we value and care for, and what it is we fear. Without that kind of information about each other we don't know what to expect. The result, especially when accompanied by lack of commitment, is slow, cautious and uncreative decision making.

It's foolish, if not impossible, to commit to people and processes we do not trust. However, once that basic level of openness and reciprocity has been established, our teams don't need to burden their problem-solving with unnecessary efforts to accommodate dissenting points of view. Trust allows us to expand the creativity of a team, because we know the disagreements aren't personal, rather they are discussed in the overall climate of agreeing to the ultimate common goal - the best for the team and the organization. So when a decision is made even though some team members see things differently, the dissenting team members can still commit to the majority's decisions because they feel like their input is respected, and they want to work as one team.

The second dysfunction, fear of conflict, can negatively impact commitment when team members have data or knowledge that could significantly inform the decision-making process but they don't share it out of the perception that it may run contrary to the "conventional wisdom". When confidence in the value of healthy and even passionate conflict about the value of ideas and strategies is well-established (and fighting about self-importance and political control is not tolerated!), a climate exists where teammates can make a strong commitment to decisions even when perfect information is not available. [Is it ever?]

When teammates trust constructive conflict and each others' skills and intentions, the paralyzing delays from needing "enough data" can also be avoided. Qualitative decision-making replaces the quantitative hedging that some teams regularly endure trying to statistically substantiate their probability of success. When you see teams stuck in the analysis mode, be sure it's a symbol demonstrating likely concerns with trust, conflict aversion and lack of commitment.



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So what skills can we use to heal these challenges? One strong field of practice - emotional and social intelligence - is a great place to look for positive results. There is a great deal to draw from - certainly more than we can cover here in a single article! Social Responsibility is a strong indicator of a committed team. In Bar-On's EQi®, this skill refers to the energy we choose to devote to larger social issues in contrast with pursuing our own self-interest. The ability to demonstrate a high-level of social responsibility requires that we be able to see the big picture and not get bogged down in provincial prejudices and disputes. This ability smacks of commitment!

Another emotional competency which factors significantly in the ability to commit to the decisions, efforts, and relationships of the team is (perhaps surprisingly) Independence. This is the skill that gives us the ability to make decisions based on our own best judgment without needing to get the emotional support of people whom we care for and respect. Independence is a required ingredient in order for people to be comfortable with conflict. When our independence is balanced by our trust for and commitment to our team, we have a can do attitude and a creative team!

What about the ability to believe that it is possible for the team, or its leader, or some of its members to make mistakes, and then correct them and be even more successful in the future? Optimism is the emotional competency which helps us move toward commitment out of a positive expectation about our capacity to achieve. Hundreds of things have already gone right today, but how many of them have we noticed and taken time to appreciate? The more optimistic we are the more we noticed and acknowledged all that went right and the more likely we are to notice more things that can go right in the future. Sustained over time, that kind of attitude will inspire commitment, even in team members who are highly skeptical!

If you'd like to learn more about facilitating and building high functioning teams gives us a call at (303) 271-0021, or contact us at mhughes@cgrowth.com.