Talent Requires TEAMWORK

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Talent matters, but teamwork matters more. Since the recession,
it matters even more.

In a world where knowledge (as measured by information on the Internet) doubles every four years, where the pace of change has increasingly grown, and where global complexity changes the rules of competition, no isolated individual has the ability to make things happen. To have sustainable organizations in a world of change and complexity, individual abilities must be combined into organization capabilities. Talent requires teamwork.

In our book *The Why of Work,* we report that high-performing teams are high-relating teams. High-relating teams have team members who find personal meaning from their team experiences. When employees find meaning within their team, they are emotionally and psychologically engaged, which leads to increased personal and team productivity. Finding meaning through team relationships may be woven into four team processes: purpose, governance, affiliation, and learning.

PURPOSE

Any successful team needs a clear purpose or reason for existing. A team purpose meets a number of criteria. The purpose of the team has a tangible or measurable output or service as a result of the team's existence. This purpose positions the team in the context of the overall organization, rallies team members, defines the outcomes or goals of the team, and justifies the team's existence. A successful team purpose that creates meaning is aspirational in that it focuses on the future and what can be by offering not easily attainable goals, customercentric in that it focuses on the outcomes of the teamwork, not just the process.

Leaders have the obligation to craft a team's purpose so that it meets the above criteria. The purpose statement engages team members when they share in its creation. This does not abdicate the leader from acting boldly, but by involving others in clarifying the team's purpose, leaders gain more power. The leader communicates the purpose through words, symbols, messages, and actions that make the purpose real to team members and users of team services. Leaders also track or monitor the team's progress towards its purpose. A sustainable team's purpose captures not only the mind by being clear about what should be done, but the heart by making sure that the purpose gives team members meaning from their teamwork.

GOVERNANCE

Governance refers to how the team operates, which includes roles, decisions, and support systems. These administrative routines shape meaning as members react to their team activity. Roles focuses on who is on the team which needs to include technical or functional experts who have specialists' expertise, customer experts who adapt knowledge to customer requirements, and managerial experts who coordinate work, set deadlines, and

administer the team activities.

A team functions through the decisions it makes. Successful decision making increases with clarity, accountability, timelines, processes, and follow-up. Below are questions that capture what we call a team decision-making protocol:

Clarity of decision: Focus on the decision that needs to be made:

- What are we trying to decide from this discussion?

- What are the two or three choices we have for this issue?

- What are the alternative decisions we have in front of us? Which ones make the most sense?

- Are there some alternatives we have not considered?

_ **Assignment of accountability:** Decide who will ultimately make this decision:

- Whose area of responsibility is this?

- Who should assume final accountability for this decision?

- How will we make this decision? Be clear about this early in the decision process.

_ **Determination of timeline:** State when the decision needs to be made:

- When do we need to make this decision?

- What are the time pressures we are under from external or other sources?

_ **Define decision process:** Prepare ways to ensure a high-quality decision:

- What are the criteria for this decision?

- How fast/slow should we make it?

- Who needs to be involved and who has information that will be helpful?

- What have others done that we can learn from?

Ensure follow-up: Have a "return and report" mechanism to track decisions:

- How well did we do on this decision?

- What are the indicators of success/failure and how are we doing?

We have found that sometimes teams get more focused on action planning than rigorous decision making. When the above five decision guidelines are followed, teams are better able to get things done. Team support systems deal with things like compensation, logistics for team meetings, administrative support, and the like. When these support mechanisms are in place, teams work better than when they are not present.Team leaders who manage governance ensure that multiple roles are fulfilled among team members, that appropriate processes are followed for making decisions, and that support systems are consistent with team directives.

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AFFILIATION

A team creates meaning and survives with healthy relationships. We have identified two dimensions of positive team relationships: caring and conflict. Caring means that team members give and receive bids and make amends. Bids represent the willingness of individuals to engage with one another. Bids may show up as personal questions

(e.g., How are you doing?), being aware of nonwork-related personal concerns, respecting differences, listening openly to each other, expressing gratitude for good work, and building trust among team members. Making amends means that team members recognize mistakes, apologize to each other, and let go of past grievances. Honest apologies enable people with different orientations to work together. The other side of caring is being able to manage conflicts. Teams succeed because people with different views come together for common interests: being able to disagree without being disagreeable; to have tension without contention; or to debate without demeaning indicate healthy team relationships. This requires that team members run into problems rather than away from them, provide honest and direct feedback to each other, and sacrifice personal interests for team objectives. Teams avoid what psychologists call relationship killers of criticism, contempt, defensiveness, and stonewalling.

Leaders set the tone for both caring and conflict. They are sensitive to who is more or less connected to the team. They work to engage the less connected. They appropriately use some team time for personal celebration and support of team members. They model debate and dialogue without personal rancor.

LEARNING

Any team does some things that work and some things that do not work. For meaning to take root and grow, teams need a commitment to learning, which means:

- Take time to reflect and assess. Time in meetings to reflect may be about an event (How did we do on this activity?) or after a time (How have we done in the last 60 days?).

- Define what has worked well. In the last ___ (30, 60, 90) days, what have we done that has worked well? Why did it work well? What can we learn from it that we can apply to similar issues going forward?

- Define what has not worked well. In the last ____ (30, 60, 90) days, what have we done that has not worked well? Why not? What went wrong? What can we learn that we can apply to future similar events? Pay attention here to not blaming an individual, but accepting responsibility for what should be learned?

- Identify the patterns of common errors made by the team (e.g., we tend to be too slow in getting decisions made). Ask those affected by the team to help identify patterns of mistakes.

- Have a spirit of learning, not blaming. Acknowledge that mistakes are made, apologize, and move forward without getting too consumed by the mistake or avoiding that it was made.

- When a mistake is made, acknowledge it quickly, boldly, and publicly. Apologize if necessary. Work not to make it again.

Learning means that teams have a self-improvement process built in to their regular work.

Leaders need to be learners by modeling curiosity, being open to feedback, apologizing when necessary, taking accountability for mistakes and sharing credit for successes, encouraging risk taking and creativity, and doing periodic learning audits where teams can process their experiences.

CONCLUSION

Much of the joy in daily life comes through sharing it with others. Still, the challenges of getting along have not diminished even with all our technology for connecting. In fact, the anonymity of e-mails, tweets, Web-based bulletin boards, and blogs often diminish personal touch so central to meaningful relationships. Globalization and equal hiring initiatives mean more and more of us work with people of different cultures, backgrounds, orientations, races, and life stages. Increased complexity of work necessitates coordinating effort among people of diverse professional training to bring products to fruition or provide the range of services expected. Getting along with people who differ from us in either overt or subtle ways requires skill, patience, selfawareness, curiosity, and empathy. And getting along with others is catching. Following these purpose, governance, relationship, and learning guidelines improves team performance. As these team processes are managed, members find meaning from their interactions together.

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