

Accelerating Team Development

A Transcend learning

How do you get senior leaders to quickly and authentically 'join together' as a real team? And why is this important? We have had two recent experiences where getting newly formed executive teams to fire on all cylinders, as one, was a business imperative.

Both were merger situations requiring executives from different companies to unite in order to rapidly integrate the organisation around them. Both CEOs came to us to work with their new teams and facilitate 'away days' at which they could establish shared vision, unite behind common purpose, and identify where they had to work together and build interdependence. Critical to this success was the CEO's own leadership style and the choice of relationship they wished to have with their teams – command and control, coach, chair, enabler, authority figure?

At both away days, a creative 'constellations' type intervention produced a remarkable shift in the teams' development. Ostensibly, the task for the team was to have every team member talk about their individual accountabilities and objectives, and name the support they needed from their colleagues in order to deliver these objectives, and thereby establish where the interdependencies and mutuality lay in the team. This could easily have been done in a conventional intervention, for example each team member handing out their written objectives and having their colleagues comment on where they could provide support. However, we sensed that a more 'system changing' intervention was required, one that required each team member to speak from their heart, not just their head, and one in which the emotional connections between the team would be fostered.

To that end we asked each team member, one by one, to stand up in the middle of a circle of their colleagues. Then, in talking through their key objectives for the year, they physically invited their different colleagues to stand up and be placed by them in a 'constellation' in which the kind of relationship they needed with them became visibly manifest (for example, they needed some colleagues closer than others, some behind them, some in front of them, some alongside them).

The directness (asking for help had not been done before) and intimacy (many mentioned the eye contact necessary) of this activity produced new insights and deeper levels of trust. The team felt tangibly different when the final constellation-setting sat down. Individuals spoke about how they now felt closer to colleagues, how it had shifted their perceived need to rely on others for support, and how the physical placement of people had communicated so much more than words. And

significantly, it enabled the CEOs, as team leaders, to graphically represent the kind of leadership role they wanted in the team. Here's what one of them said afterwards to a team member who could not be present on the day:

"I did my constellation last and so benefited from the other contributions! I started by getting everyone in a circle holding hands, with me standing in the middle and getting them to circle round me and me turning too – the hub and spoke model, which was making me "dizzy" very quickly! So, I said "let's change it and I will stand outside the circle looking out of the window at the wonderful view". I stated that..."I am accountable for the vision, talent and shareholder value". Jane, David, Phillip and Mark are in the centre and said that this is the hub or group. You, the other regions/globals circle, are responsible for growth – profit and revenue. It revolves around the hub. Steve and Michael are part of this region/global circle and must be closely connected with you all to maximize revenue and profit growth. You faced all the group and could turn to face me, and I would turn to face you for coaching, encouragement and help as required. That's as good as I can get the description! Seemed to go down well!"

From these two experiences we witnessed yet again the power of facilitating interventions in which the **process** holds the potential to 'change things in the moment', rather than merely talk about or describe things outside of the 'here and now'.

Deborah Rowland, Chief Executive

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