Trust & Teamwork

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There is a considerable amount of confusion regarding trust and teamwork. Some teamwork proponents, such as Patrick Lencioni, believe trust is foundational to teams, and if there is no trust, then teams cannot get past go and collect $200. This approach considers trust as an input variable, and Five Dysfunctions of a Team advocates usually start team engagements by doing trust building activities and then move on to other issues affecting team dynamics and performance.

This is the wrong way to look at team trust, as we see it as more of a mediating or output variable. Team members trust each other when they believe everyone on the team: (1) has the right skills and experience to do their jobs (ability); (2) puts their own agendas aside and does what is right for the team (benevolence); and (3) plays by the rules, safeguards confidential information, and follows through on commitments (integrity). Sharing MBTI, DISC, Social Styles, or Enneagram results will not provide any insights into evaluations of ability, benevolence, and integrity; this happens when team members work through adversity and share common experiences. Team trust takes time to develop, and the more teams succeed, the more likely team trust will increase.

Another problem with the Lencioni philosophy is to look at the base level of trust in teams. According to research, 90 percent of team members somewhat or completely trust each other. Working on trust when some level is already in place seems like a faulty assumption and potential waste of time and resources. Moreover, a much higher level of trust is needed for teams to perform at high levels than for groups or hybrids (collections of people having both team and group characteristics). Most collections of people fall into the latter two categories, and many team models fail to make the distinction between group and teams.

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