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BUILDING TRUST IN A TEAM

- Why ?
- How ?

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My experience

During my studies, I had the chance to collaborate, observe and/or integrate multiple teams. Indeed, being part of the Swiss Team Academy program, I was part of a team. I then went on a university exchange to the TAMK university, joining the Proakatemia program. I am writing this article as part of this exchange.

I decided to focus on the functioning of teams because I think it is an important topic that concerns everyone. During my experiences, I have faced different situations. Situations where the team is doing well, not so well, or not at all. So I tried to understand what factors impacted the functioning and dynamics of the teams.

In Switzerland, it took us a long time to understand what a team is and what it entails. We became aware of this when our coach presented us with the Lencioni pyramid. When we saw the pyramid, we understood where we were and where we were going. From that day on, we put in place different tools to climb the different steps of this pyramid.

In this article I will focus on the first step of this pyramid essentially.

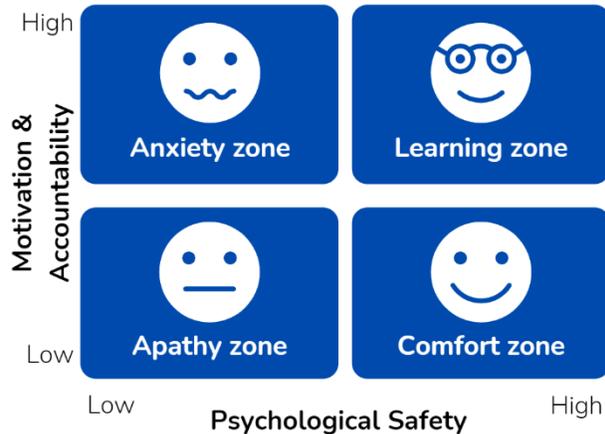
Trust

This is the name of the first step of Lencioni's pyramid which you can find below. Lencioni's pyramid represents the 5 dysfunctions of a team. The first is lack of trust, followed by fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of responsibility and lack of focus on results. (Lencioni, 2002)

The reason I want to focus on this first step is because I feel that it is the step that I know the most about and that has the most impact on a team once it is passed. Also, from my studies, I know that getting past this first step is very rewarding individually. Since my experiences have been in learning teams, trust has also been a key step in order for me to thrive in my studies.

In my opinion, trust enhances psychological safety, and if we refer to Amy Edmondson's work on the subject, developing psychological safety in an environment allows individuals to be in their comfort zone or learning zone instead of being in the apathy or anxiety zones (see diagram below).





According to this pattern, improving the psychological safety of team members will have a positive effect. But how do we do this?

By working on trust, we can improve the psychological safety of individuals. (Edmondson, 1999)

But first, it is important to understand what trust is. Trust is what allows us to rely on others. (Wikipedia, 2022)

But how is this notion fundamental in the functioning of teams? And how can we create it within teams? I will try to answer

these questions by presenting the tools I have used the most to build and improve trust within teams. This allowed us to enter the psychological safety zone in order to maximize the learning moments. It also allowed us to dare conflict and to give ourselves responsibilities within the teams of which I was a part.

The impacts of a lack of trust in a team are multiple. We can distinguish between short-term and long-term effects.

Short-term effects :

- High level of stress
- Low satisfaction
- Low commitment to relationships
- Low perceived performance

Long-term effects :

- Tensions
- Unsatisfaction
- Unproductivity
- High rate of absenteeism

(Costa, Roe, & Taillieu, 2001)

It is therefore understandable how important it is, not only for the team members, but also for the team itself, to build a foundation of trust between individuals.

The tools

In this part I will present you different tools that I could use and that contributed to have a better team dynamic. I was able to experiment each of them and will give you feedback on them. Some of the tools are also presented in the book " L'équipe apprenante " by Etienne Collignon.

Personal History

This tool consists of writing down one's personal story. Each team member is asked a series of questions, and each person answers them. The idea is to then share these answers with other team members. The questions we answered were the following:

- What is my background?
- What kind of person am I? What are my strengths and weaknesses? What are my values? What are my beliefs?
- What kind of person do I want to become? What strengths do I want to develop? What do I want to give up?
- What actions do I need to take to become the person described in the previous point?
- What evidence will I see when I get there? What indicators will show that I have arrived?

This tool allows each member to better understand the others. It is very useful individually as well since it allows for introspection. As a team it helps build trust, so I recommend doing it as early as possible.

The Compétences

Organizing a discussion on the subject of each person's skills will create synergies and positive interactions between the team members. They will know who to turn to very quickly, which will increase the efficiency of your team. I recommend allowing 5 minutes of speaking time per participant, with 5 minutes to introduce the activity and 5 minutes to conclude. It would be best if team members had time to think about their skills before the activity so that the sharing is as relevant as possible.

Personality Profiles

Another great tool for teams is the personality test. By taking a personality test and sharing the results with other team members, the team will have access to an objective and neutral view of each other's personalities. These results can also be used to create synergies based on the established profiles. I have personally used the Leonardo and Belbin profiles in team building. The results of these tests will also allow the team to better understand the other individuals, and therefore to adapt to them in the different situations that will arise.

The NVC

Non-violent communication, also abbreviated NVC, is a very useful tool to create a climate of security and trust within teams. This communication tool consists in speaking in "I" and expressing emotions about actions. This method of communication is benevolent and allows you to express yourself without putting the other person in a confrontational position. I am particularly fond of this tool because it really allows everyone to express themselves in an optimal way, while minimizing the risks of a discussion negatively impacting the team's dynamics.

The check-in and the check-out

The check-in is probably the easiest tool to implement. It consists of sharing one's feelings at the beginning of the session/day with the other members of the team. This brings the team members closer together as everyone opens up to each other. It is important not to be judgmental of others when using this tool as it could have the opposite effect. The goal is to create a climate of trust, and by expressing oneself in a sincere manner, other members will also be more likely to express themselves in a sincere manner. If a team member expresses a feeling that he or she is having a hard time with, it will be much easier for the rest of the team to act accordingly so as not to add to that person's emotional burden, for example. The check-in also improves the emotional intelligence of the people who use it. In general, we try to use the CVN to do these check-ins. We build them like this: I feel ... because my need of ... is The check-out is less structured, we can just say in one word how we feel, without detailing why. This allows us to show others our state of mind at the end of a day or at the end of a session.

Conclusion

To conclude, if I had to suggest you the best tools to implement right now in your team, it would be the check-in and the NVC. I really think that those 2 tools can change drastically the dynamic of a team. Those tools will take time to be mastered, but little by little you will be able to see the positive effects of those ones. Building trust in a team is a long process, and every action counts. That is why starting to use those tools as soon as possible is the best. The impacts of the lack of trust will little by little go away and your team will be able to perform better than never.

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