LEADING HIGH-IMPACT TEAMS
LDR 5263 - 530

INSTRUCTOR: DR. JASON KENNEDY

SYNTHESIS/REFLECTION PAPER

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Over the length of this course, I have had my understanding of a team challenged at every level, what it should look like, what it feels like, and how it should be led. The importance of a healthy, high-functioning team dynamic cannot be understated. When an organization is comprised of healthy teams, its impact can transcend the sum of its parts. Leaving this course, I am convinced even more that it is possible to experience a sense of ease, confidence, and connectivity in teamwork. Teamwork does not have to be marked by stress, negativity, negotiation, or intense pressure. When teams unite under a healthy, productive culture, every member and the organization as a whole can thrive.

There is a synergy that comes from unity. An exponential effect that begins to take place when a team functions according to their design. We are all made for connection and unity, just as the Godhead is three-in-one. We are made in that image, designed to integrate together in certain ways. Created with the loving intention of connection, we each fit together to form a body, the body of Christ, of which He is the head. This is the truth that plays out on our teams. Author after author, whether experienced in church ministry, professional sports, business, or the military, identified the profound impact that team atmosphere plays on success not just in overall performance for the organization but also in the people's individual lives.

Across all of these sources, one core principle was crystal clear. When it comes to a team, *trust* is what holds it all together. Like the ligaments and tendons in our bodies, trust is the connective tissue that holds a team, and broad-scale organization, in unity. Lencioni (2002) asserts, “Trust lies at the heart of a functioning, cohesive team. Without it, teamwork is all but impossible.” (p.195). Gordon and Smith (2015) explain

this idea further by highlighting that trust is necessary to build strong relationships, and "without strong relationships, you can't have a strong team" (p.51). Strong, high-functioning teams just cannot exist without a deep bond of trust.

The type of deep trust needed to facilitate high-functioning teams is multi-directional. It must permeate every level and relationship within the team. The military, it seems, knows this fact all too well. McChrystal (2015) knows that the elite special forces teams within the military are completely dependent on the strong bonds of trust between their squad mates. So much so that they have designed their training and testing programs, such as the Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL training (BUD/S), to first and foremost construct "a strong lattice of trusting relationships" (McChrystal, et. al., 2015, p.96). As Kennedy (n.d.b) discussed in lecture four of this course, trust is one of the seven characteristics of a healthy organizational culture. Trust must be developed between all team members if you want to experience a healthy, thriving team.

This, of course, begins with the relationships each team member has with their leader. As with most elements of team culture, the actions of the leader in actively establishing trusting relationships sets the tone for the entire team. In fact, without trust, a leader cannot ascend the levels of influence. According to Maxwell's influence acrostic, as discussed in lecture seven, one key characteristic required to gain influence is integrity. An integrous leader curries trust with those that they lead (Kennedy, n.d.d). Without this key factor of trust, a leader would be left operating solely out of positional power. This type of leadership can quickly become toxic to the culture of the organization.

A good leader knows that a large part of their job is tending to trust- earning it, facilitating it, maintaining it, and applying it. Many of the principles highlighted throughout the materials of this course are closely related to trust. For the remainder of this reflection, I will highlight a few of the common principles of teamwork that stood out most to me, their relationship to trust, and my intentions to implement these principles in my own team and leadership.

Care

The first principle from this course that I am highlighting is the principle of showing *care.* Gordon & Smith (2015) assert caring is "the ultimate team-building strategy" (p.110). It isn't enough to just learn facts about people or to share space with them, you have to show care in order to truly connect and build trust. Care & connection are the *foundation* for trust. Lencioni (2002) defines trust as "the confidence among team members that their peers' intentions are good, and that there is no reason to be protective or careful around the group" (p.195). This type of trust can only be experienced when there is a foundation of care and connection built between team members.

Caring does not mean that team members must all be best friends, but they need to find a base level of connection and care for one another as it pertains to the work at hand. Respecting one another and the role they play on the team. This type of care can be facilitated and expressed in a number of ways. Lencioni (2002) gives a list of different exercises and assessments that can be utilized to grow familiarity and connection between team members. These exercises create opportunities for team members to be vulnerable and then, hopefully, be met with care.

As a leader, I believe cultivating this care begins with me. In my own leadership, I desire to first be a leader who cares and then to help my team members develop the same care for one another. Gordon and Smith (2015) encourage leaders to show their care through service: "…extend yourself to others and serve them." (p. 109). I have always desired to be a leader who serves, but in the busy day-to-day of an ever-growing list of tasks, I must be intentional to keep my mind on the people. I must remember to lift my gaze beyond my own to-do list, to serve and express care to the people on my team. This is the foundation of trust. The start of building a high-impact team.

Communication

I don't think there is a single book on teamwork that does not in some way point to the importance of healthy communication. Communication is inherent to all human relationships and as such is massively important to teamwork. Gordon and Smith (2015) clearly recognized the importance of communication to teamwork when they included it as one of their "seven Cs to build a great team" (p.xii). Maxwell (2013) also emphasizes the importance of communication in his book, *The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork,* with his "Law of Communication" which states, "Interaction fuels action." (p.197). Communication can also be seen playing a key role in McChrystal's (2015) "Team of Teams" model. The free-flowing exchange of information within and between teams was crucial to generating the sense of "shared consciousness" that makes successful high-functioning teams.

These are just a few examples of how communication has shined throughout all the materials of this course, but it is Gordon and Smith (2015) who best describe the relationship between trust, communication, and successful teams: "Communication

builds trust. Trust generates commitment. Commitment fosters teamwork, and teamwork delivers results." (p.51). Communication is the *fuel* for trust. Trust can only begin when two people interact with one another. In this way, the fuel of communication is what enables the engine of trust to start. Once it's running, trust still requires the fuel of communication to keep it going. Communication has the power to start a trusting relationship, and bad communication has the power to end a trusting relationship. Good communication is imperative to maintaining strong, successful teams.

Communication within my own team is improving, but there is still plenty of room for improvement. One strategy for improving communication that I am committed to is communicating with questions. Kennedy (n.d.a) discussed in lecture 6 of this course, communicating with questions is an important leadership shift to make from a more managerial style which typically focuses more on finding answers than asking questions. I can often find myself in this type of problem-solving mindset, especially as more of a second-chair leader. It is so easy to jump right into solving issues as they arise, but great leaders must first be good listeners who facilitate teamwork by asking good questions (Maxwell, 2013). For this reason, I am making every effort to slow down and engage my strategic mind in a new way by communicating with questions.

Conflict

Though not always recognized for its important role in building high-impact teams, healthy conflict is nevertheless an essential and inevitable part of teamwork. You could consider conflict a sub-point of communication, but I am listing it separately because it plays a unique role within teamwork that is too often overlooked or completely disregarded.

“All great relationships, the ones that last over time, require productive conflict in order to grow” (Lencioni, 2002, p.202). Most often conflict is talked about as if it is inevitable and something that must be managed rather than something that is beneficial and needed for high-impact teamwork. However, Lencioni

Until engaging in this course, the role of healthy conflict was never something I had heard about in relationship with leadership or teamwork. In his book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Lencioni uncovers the essential nature of conflict in his second dysfunction of a team, fear of conflict (Lencioni, 2002).

> Unfortunately, conflict is considered taboo in many situations, especially at work. And the higher you go up the management chain, the more you find people spending inordinate amounts of time and energy trying to avoid the kind of passionate debates that are essential to any great team…
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> But teams that engage in productive conflict know that the only purpose is to produce the best possible solution in the shortest period of time. They discuss and resolve issues more quickly and completely than others, and they emerge from heated debates with no residual feelings or collateral damage, but with an eagerness and readiness to take on the next important issue. (Lencioni, 2002, pp. 202-203)

Based on this picture of health conflict, it is clearly a powerful tool for any team desiring to make a big impact. However, getting a team of people to willingly and repeatedly engage in conflict is not an easy feat. It takes time, and most of all, it takes *trust*. For this reason, I have identified healthy conflict as the *function of trust*.

Teams need to build trust so that they can engage in this type of productive conflict without fear of potential negative effects. This same principle of trust and conflict also applies to what Scoggins (2017) describes as “challenging up” (p. 169). “Challenging up” happens when a team member challenges the very systems or policies of the organization itself. Most often this challenge (or conflict) is expressed to the leader who determines and upholds these systems (Scroggins, 2017). These types of conflict require tact, but if the team member has not developed mutual trust with their leader, it is almost assuredly doomed to failure.

As someone working on a team that I do not lead, I see the realities of conflict and teamwork every day. I understand the value of conflict, and desire to utilize it to the benefit of our team and organization. For this reason, I continue to cultivate trust with both my teammates and my leader. I am also training myself in how to best engage in conflict so that I can continue to show myself capable and trustworthy in times of productive conflict.

Empowerment

For any team to function at a high level, its leader must be empowering. Kennedy (n.d.c.) pointed out that this type of high-level delegation isn’t just passing work off to others. It is instilling in them both the responsibility and authority needed to oversee a given duty or project. When done correctly, empowerment has the power to multiply the impact of a leader and their entire organization. In our second lecture for this course, we discussed Peter Drucker’s observation of the effective non-profit team that “all work is

work for the team" (Kennedy, n.d.e). Leaders cannot hold all the work but must delegate and empower their team in order to utilize their strengths and cover their weaknesses.

Any good leader knows the necessity of empowerment, but actually handing off authority to others can feel risky. Are they ready? Will they rise to the call? Will they be able to execute at the level you would? What happens if they fail? These are the types of questions that can run through a leader's head. Through his leadership experience, McChrystal (2015) came to the realization that "the risks of acting too slowly were higher than the risks of letting competent people make judgment calls" (p.209). When it comes to empowerment, it is worth the risk. In fact, McChrystal observed "even as speed increased and we pushed authority further down, the *quality* of decisions actually went *up*" (p.214).

Empowerment is the *fruit* of trust. It can feel risky but, when a leader sows trust into their team members in the form of intentional delegation, the result is an empowered team putting out quality work in record time. This is the type of leader I want to be and the type of team I want to be on. For now, in my current context, I am actively looking for ways to begin sowing trust in my fellow team members and in upcoming students within our program. Equipped with the seven steps to successful delegation, and other tools for empowering others, I am looking at both my list of tasks and the talent pool around me to find and maximize opportunities to improve the productivity of our organization through empowerment (Kennedy, n.d.c.).

Overall, this course has stretched my understanding of teamwork exponentially, and through it all I have found this cord of trust. Its value for teams cannot be understated. So many principles for teamwork and team leadership revolve around

trust. From foundation to fruit, we see the impact and importance of trust in principles such as care, communication, conflict, and empowerment. Walking away from this course I plan to implement each of these principles in my teamwork and future leadership to establish the foundation of trust, to fuel trust, to work the function of trust, and to reveal and express the fruit of trust. Only then will I realize the full force of serving on and leading a high-impact team.

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