

Leveraging Leadership and Teamwork Skills

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- Titles of easier presentations I could have given...
 - Disaster Recovery Architecture and Planning
 - Information Security Threats and Countermeasures
 - Organizational Models for IT Infrastructure
- Inspiration and framework from:
 - Patrick Lencioni, Management Consultant, “The Five Dysfunctions of a Team”

Analysis of the Title

- Leveraging: to use to your advantage
- Leadership Skills
 - Technical Leadership
 - Professional Leadership
- Teamwork Skills
 - Inevitable in the business (and academic) world
 - But good teamwork does not come naturally

Leadership

- What techies are good at:
 - Attention to detail
 - Innovative and creative thinking
 - Principle and data driven decision making
- How do you leverage these as leadership skills?

Success and Effectiveness

- Execution is everything
- To be able to Execute requires Influence
- To Influence requires Leadership
- Leadership comes from Experience
- Experience comes from Solving Problems
- Solving Problems to completion is Execution

Attention to Detail

- Planning
 - “Failure to plan is planning to fail”
 - Solutions are complex and require detailed plans
 - Plans must include options
 - Apply Attention to Detail
 - Understanding everything required to deliver
 - Lead the rest of the team to understand as well

Innovative and Creative Thinking

- Designing a solution
 - Probably the most straightforward aspect
 - Ensure you ask “what happens if...”
- Principle and Data Driven Decision making
 - Essential in financial planning
 - Defend financial planning as much as technical planning

Leadership

- Hard to define, but leaders:
 - Have the confidence of others
 - Covers all the bases to make sure things get done
- Apply all the technical attributes to solve problems:
 - Attention to Detail
 - Innovative and Creative Thinking
 - Principle and Data-Driven Decision Making

Leadership Qualities

- Leadership != Title
- Objectivity, Accountability
- Willingness to succeed and overcome obstacles
- Understand the big picture
- Own the problem, from beginning to end
- Leadership skills all apply even if you're just leading yourself
- Credibility, Trust, Confidence follow

Teamwork

- “Teamwork is a lot of people doing what I say”
(Marketing executive, Citrix Corporation, date unknown)

That’s one approach, we’ll look at another...

Team Theory

- Why teams?
 - Team > sum(parts)
 - Get a team of performers rowing in the same direction will produce far better results than the same group working individually
- This ideal is not always met
 - People are imperfect
 - Therefore teams are inherently dysfunctional

Essentials for Team Success

- Simple but not easy...
- Trust
- Open Discussion/Fear of Conflict
- Commitment
- Accountability
- Focus on Results

Trust

- Foundation of every good team
- In this context:
 - Confidence that peers in the group have good intentions and there is no reason to be protective or careful around the group
 - Not the typical definition of predictability of action based on past experience
- Trust != Agreement
- Counter the need for invulnerability

Team Attributes Dependant on Trust

Trusting Teams	Absence of Trust
Admit Mistakes and Weaknesses	Hide Mistakes and Weaknesses
Offer help willingly even in areas outside direct responsibility	Hesitate to ask or offer help
Leverage others skills and experiences for the benefit of the team	Fail to recognize others skills or experiences
More willing to take risks, accept failures and move on, high morale	Withhold feedback, waste time on politics, low morale, not accepting of risk
Spend time and energy on constructive activities	Dread meetings and avoid spending time with the team

Building Trust within a Team

- Not easy and does take time
 - Familiarity with team members
 - Credibility built over time
 - Shared experiences
- Ways to accelerate this process:
 - Personal Histories Exercise
 - Team Effectiveness Exercise

Fear of Conflict

- “Productive Conflict” needed on concepts/
ideas
 - Produces the best possible ideas in the shortest period of time
 - Resolves issues faster, without residue of hard feelings

Open Discussion

- Agreement on everything usually not reality
- Admission of differences is healthy, needed
- Encourage debate, exchange of ideas
- Avoid political dialogue; choosing words based on getting the desired reaction rather than what they really think
- Avoid fear of conflict (artificial harmony)
- Need the ability to constructively argue without causing collateral damage (trust)

Team Attributes Dependant on Conflict

Teams that engage in conflict	Teams that fear conflict
Have lively, interesting meetings	Have boring meetings
Minimize politics	Create opportunity for back-channel politics
Solve real problems quickly	Ignore controversial issues that are critical to team success
Leverage all the ideas & experience of the team	Fail to tap into all the opinions and experience of the team
Put critical topics on the table for discussion	Waste time and energy on politics and posturing

Overcoming Fear of Conflict

- Acknowledge that conflict is productive is usually not enough to overcome natural avoidance of conflict
 - Conflict Mining: assign a member of the team to be ‘conflict miner’ who objectively digs out and sheds daylight on hidden issues or disagreements to reach a resolution
 - Tension Drain: when needed, team members periodically remind the group the progress being made through difficult exchanges, giving participants confidence to continue

Commitment

- Given the trust and open discussion, the team now knows they have considered all the options and can commit to a decision
 - Clarity
 - Buy-in

Commitment: Two Gotchas

- Commitment != Consensus
 - Seeking consensus results in compromise, often not satisfying anyone
 - Usually poor results
- Certainty
 - A decision is usually better than no decision
 - Boldly being wrong and changing direction is better than hedging until certain

Commitment

- Builds off trust and open discussion
- Constructive conflict is important for the team to clearly buy into a decision
- This is a difficult part:
 - Commitment != consensus
 - Lack of commitment leads to ambiguity
 - Teams can be paralyzed by the need for complete agreement
 - At some point the debate must stop, and even those that disagree must commit
 - Allow everyone to weigh in

Team Attributes Dependant on Commitment

A team that commits	A team that fails to commit
Creates clarity about direction and priorities	Creates ambiguity among the team about direction and priorities
Develops the ability to learn from mistakes	Watches windows of opportunity close
Takes early advantage of new opportunities	Breeds lack of confidence and fear of failure
Aligns entire team around objectives	Revisits discussions and decisions again and again, wasting time
Moves forward without hesitation; can change direction without guilt	Encourages second-guessing among team members

Overcoming Lack of Commitment

- Cascading Messaging
 - At end of meeting, team reviews decisions and how they should be communicated; leave meetings fully aligned, dig out inconsistent understandings
- Deadlines for decisions and milestones
 - Helps crystallize misalignment in the team early

Overcoming Lack of Commitment

- Worst-case Scenario Analysis
 - For a team struggling with a decision
 - Determine the cost of a wrong decision
- Low-Risk Exposure Therapy
 - Force decision making on low-risk items after discussion but without detailed analysis
 - There is a point where further analysis is a waste of time and would not affect the decision

Accountability

- You have clarity and commitment, next is to hold each other accountable for what the team has decided to do
 - And call out team members for actions that hurt the team

Accountability

- Can be difficult to hold your peers up to a standard (particularly a high one)
 - “Who am I to tell that person what to do?”
 - It’s natural to want to avoid difficult conversations
 - But lack of accountability also shows lack of buy-in
 - Need to have the rest of the foundation (starting with trust)
 - Respect, always, but still need to push

Team Attributes Dependant on Accountability

A Team that holds one another accountable	A team that avoids accountability
Ensures that poor performers feel pressure to improve	Creates resentment among team members with different standards of performance
Identifies potential problems quickly by questioning approaches of others without hesitation	Encourages mediocrity
Establishes respect among team members who are held to the same high standard	Misses deadlines and key deliverables
Avoids excessive bureaucracy around performance management and corrective action	Places an undue burden on the team leader to be sole source of discipline

Overcoming Lack of Accountability

- Known set of goals and standards
 - Clarify publically what is to be achieved, who needs to deliver what
 - Important to keep the plan in the open so it is not easily ignored or misinterpreted
 - Clarity is the key to accountability, ambiguity is its enemy

Overcoming Lack of Accountability

- Simple and Regular Progress Reviews
 - A known structure and set of expectations that the team will regularly review each others progress
- Team Rewards for Team Achievement
 - If the performance of the team is the important thing, then rewards should be to the team as well, not individuals

Focus on Results

- Individual recognition, status and ego get in the way
- Define success by the collective results of the team

Competing Focus

- Team status
 - Sometimes just *being on* the team is enough to satisfy some members (status)
 - Success via association with the team; “results optional”
- Individual status
 - Tendency of people to focus on their personal results rather than the team
 - Some teams “exist to exist” rather than deliver meaningful objectives

Team Attributes Dependant on Results Focus

A team that focuses on collective results	A team that is not focused on results
Retains the best achievement-oriented members	Stagnates, fails to grow
Is more successful and deals with failure better	Rarely defeats competitors
Minimizes individualistic behaviour	Loses achievement-oriented members, as they find other teams
Benefits from members who put the team goals first	Encourages team members to focus on their own individual goals
Avoids distractions	Is easily distracted

Goals Overcoming Lack of Results

Focus

- Public Declaration of Success
 - Encourages desire to achieve goals as more will be aware of failure
 - “We’ll do our best” is hedging and is mentally preparing for missed deadlines and failure
- Results-based Rewards
 - Ties in with accountability
 - Rewards for team success rather than individual
 - Rewarding effort alone takes the focus off results

Framework Summary

- Trust
 - Open Discussion (No Fear of Conflict)
 - Commitment
 - Accountability
 - Results Focus
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- Team skills are simple, common sense, but mastering these requires uncommon discipline and persistence