

## **Creating Successful Teams with Emotional Intelligence**

- HCI White Paper by Ross Jones

The bottom-line impact of team skills such as communication, conflict resolution, and sharing are only now getting acknowledged in professional organizations. Yet the idea that athletes require superior teamwork has long been recognized as critical to a sports team's success. To wit:

*"Michael, if you can't pass, you can't play."* -Dean Smith

These were coach Dean Smith's powerful words to Michael Jordan during his freshman year playing basketball at the University of North Carolina. As the concepts of collaboration and teambuilding become cornerstones in the professional world, research is emerging to help define and measure successful teams in business terms. One of the most important factors in predicting and improving a team's success is its emotional intelligence.

At a recent Human Capital Institute webcast, *Creating Successful Teams with Emotional Intelligence* (March, 2007), Marcia Hughes, President of Collaborative Growth and author of *Emotional Intelligence in Action*, revealed how top-performing teams achieve sustainable productivity by practicing emotional and social skills.

Emotional intelligence is the ability to recognize and manage one's emotions, as well as the ability to recognize and respond effectively to the emotions of others. It not only includes being able to engage with others in your group, but also understanding your group and extended social community from the "big picture" point of view. When taken from this organization, community, or world perspective, the term "emotional and social intelligence (ESI) helps put a name to those non-cognitive skills that govern our interactions with ourselves and others. Says Hughes, "High IQ (cognitive intelligence) may get a person a job, but it is high ESI that is likely to be the most important indicator of how effective a person is in his or her job, and certainly is the most important factor in determining the success of any group within an organization."

In her work with business teams, Hughes has found that these skills can be developed to foster increased accountability and better decision making. Organizations that focus on increasing the emotional and social intelligence of their individual contributors and teams will see sustainable increases in productivity and higher emotional and social well-being within their teams. "Highly emotionally intelligent teams not only adapt well to change," Hughes points out, "but are able to effectively direct change."

### **ESI and Team Efficacy**

Research in the field of social interaction demonstrates that human brains are hard-wired to make connections with other people, which is excellent for teams. Reuven Bar-On, creator of the Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-iâ), a measure of emotional and social functioning, emphasizes that the components of ESI "determine how effectively we understand and express ourselves, understand others and relate with them, and cope with daily demands." Recent contributions in the study of neuroscience have supported the idea that chemical changes in the brain occur during social interactions, and can impact mood and a team's ability to collaborate. In his 2006 book, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships*, Daniel Goleman describes how both positive and negative social interactions actually change the brain and individual behavior—for better or for worse.

## Team Building

At the team level, there are several core skills that, when properly developed, can lead to positive results and lasting benefits. These seven skills (Figure 1) are essential components of effective teams, and drive both individual and team performance.

Figure 1

### Core Skills

- ◆ Identity
- ◆ Motivation
- ◆ Emotional Awareness
- ◆ Communication
- ◆ Conflict Resolution
- ◆ Stress Tolerance
- ◆ Positive Mood



#### 1. Identity

Hughes defines a team as “a group who interdependently seek to solve problems in order to improve the quality of life.” Successful teams have this sense of purpose—that what they’re doing makes some difference in the world—that gives them the motivation and resolve to succeed. Only once a team has a goal can its individuals really feel accountable. Hughes reminds us that “people are hungry to be held accountable. Find measurable goals, and they will thrive and be more productive and have a higher sense of power.”

All teams need a name. Naming something identifies it as unique, and gives the members something to rally around. When roles and responsibilities are known not only by the team but by the organization, team members feel recognized, accountable, and from that flows a sense of pride. “Perhaps because they feel noticed—that the organization knows they exist and has an expectation—that true productivity will come out of their work.”

#### 2. Motivation

Each individual team member has unique needs, desires, and goals. When these collective motivators are brought together, the common features can be used to develop a shared purpose for the team. Motivation will come when people see that individual and team goals are linked with intrinsic and extrinsic measures of success that are important to them.

Salespeople are often known as being fantastic achievers because they set certain objective business goals intentionally, then strive to exceed them. Why not apply the same intention and goal setting to ESI? Dedication to practicing good ESI includes proficiency in time management almost as much as it requires well-developed people skills. We need to balance empathy with all the other tasks we set out to accomplish in the day.

### **3. Emotional Awareness**

Emotional awareness among individuals and within the team requires first that individuals develop their ability to determine their emotional state and that of the group as a whole. The latter is often overlooked, says Hughes. Heightened emotional states can impair the team's ability to be strategically aware and make good decisions. Put aside time each meeting—or space in each communication—to reflect on any concerns. Instead of grumbling reactively, groups need to be encouraged to discuss their worries and challenges. Everyone has experienced meetings in which their team seemed "flat." On those days, the emotionally aware team leader knows to cut the meeting short and move on with other work—or, if that is not possible, acknowledge the present mood of the team, to oneself and others, and accomplish what the team can. A genuine "how is everyone?" at the beginning of the conversation can save wasted time and address potential problems before they arise.

Work to develop a team culture in which feelings are leveraged to tap into values. Take a moment to stop and ask yourself how you're feeling. How are the others around you? Could a negative "gut" reaction indicate an incompatibility with the team's business strategy? To find out, encourage questions such as "why should we invest in x?" and "how does this affect our business plan?" Considering previously unheard perspectives leverages team expertise and helps inform optimal solutions.

### **4. Communication**

Probably one of the most talked-about topics in team building, communication not only involves understanding the message being sent, but understanding who the sender and receiver are. The ability to send and receive communication about feelings, not just content, is essential to optimal team building.

Hughes asks us to ponder, "how does email support communication, and when does it hurt it?" Panelist Michael Klein, Business Consultant at Massachusetts Mutual Life Insurance Company, agrees that teams can lose out on non-verbal information when they rely on email communication. Research shows that 38% of communication comes from hearing the tonality of a person's voice and 55% from being able to read the emotions in a person's face and body language, leaving only 7% for words. Klein suggests that teams "use the phone more and email less." Voice mail messages, to individuals or to the whole team, can be an effective substitute for many of the emails that we send—and have the advantage of allowing the sender and receiver to use inflection and tonality to enrich communication.

### **5. Conflict Resolution**

Says Hughes, "conflict is one of the greatest gifts a team can receive. The question is, are you able to work with that gift?" The key to good conflict resolution is "collaborative communication." Diffusing and resolving conflict within a team requires getting all team members working together to develop ideas and approaches for overcoming conflict in a way that helps everyone. This is where empathy or, as Hughes calls it, "empathic assertiveness" is critical. She describes empathic assertiveness as "the ability to respond to messages with patience, willingness, and positive intention." By putting yourself in the place of other team members, you understand how conflict is affecting others. "Receiving acknowledgment and respect is receiving empathy," explains Hughes. "Many conflicts come down to individuals feeling that they are not receiving their fair share of either."

### **6. Stress Tolerance**

No matter how well teams master the other skills, there will be stressful days and setbacks—both for individuals and the team. "Imagine driving to work," says Hughes, "the light is stuck on red at a big intersection, there's a stalled car on a major highway, you worry about running out of gas the whole way there; you walk into

the office frazzled. Now multiply these daily events by the number of people on your team and picture what's brought to the table when you have a 'simple' team meeting!" Managing stress is certainly a skill, but not exacerbating another's stress is potentially even more impactful. It's crucial to know when we're taking one another over the edge.

## **7. Positive Mood**

The ability to tolerate stressors and maintain a positive mood are closely related skills that help teams build resilience and stamina. Developing a fun, authentically happy team environment, both inside and outside of work, can help team members cope during difficult times. Team members are all responsible for maintaining a positive team attitude.

Professor Sigal Barsade of the Wharton School, University of Pennsylvania, is known for her studies of what she calls "the ripple effect," which describes the idea that our emotions are contagious:

"Group members experience moods at work. These moods ripple out and, in the process, influence not only other group members' emotions, but their group dynamics and individual cognitions, attitudes, and behaviors as well." 2

In a research study, Barsade found that groups who experienced positive emotional contagion led to improved cooperation, decreased conflict, and increased perceptions of task performance. The opposite was the case when teams experienced negative emotional contagion. Even if only a few team members practice positive energy, it can have a huge effect on the team. "A person with moderate positive energy can counteract someone with high negative energy," says Hughes.

## **Return on Emotion**

What can a team expect in the short term after developing and implementing these seven skills? "The four linked results of better trust, empathy, loyalty and decisions," says Hughes.

Increased trust and loyalty will flow directly from the better emotional awareness within the team, as well as through the development of the other skills. "Trust is the glue that holds effective teams together," Hughes stresses. "Strong bonds help a team persevere under duress, face tough challenges, and meet creative problem solving mandates." Trust creates permission to think outside the box, allowing for people to think in different ways, be innovative, and accept vulnerability. "Often, executives don't feel like they should be vulnerable," she states, "but they need to share worries and excitement and weaknesses to achieve effective performance." Klein adds that the phenomenon of the "impenetrable" executive does not create the sense of team security it is intended to; rather it undermines the concerns of the team. "There is great strength in showing weakness," says Klein, "and teams recognize that authentic leadership."

U.S. President Woodrow Wilson is famously quoted as saying "I not only use all the brains I have, but all I can borrow." His sentiment reflects the work done by behavioral scientists suggesting that highly collaborative teams are smarter than the sum of their parts. Hillary Elfenbein, assistant professor at Berkley, recently published a study linking emotional intelligence with team performance at work. She found that "teams with greater average emotional intelligence have higher team functioning than [did] groups with lower emotional intelligence." Moreover, in a team, "the ability to understand one another's emotional expressions explained 40% of the variance in team performance."3

## **Developing Team ESI**

"I believe that a big part of coaching is always going to include emotional skills," says Klein. Six fundamental tenets of emotional and social intelligence outlined by Hughes can be leveraged to optimize personal and team performance:

1. Understand the team's emotions.
2. Manage and express your emotions with "intentionality."
3. Understand and respect the emotions of others.
4. Respond to, influence, and interact with the emotions of others.
5. Recognize that your team's emotions occur in a social context.
6. Understand that ESI helps deal with change

These skills can be improved through individual and team practice. In the long term, an organization that focuses on improving the emotional-social intelligence interaction will gain sustainable productivity, and improved emotional and social well-being of their teams. A socially and emotionally intelligent team, Hughes says, "is able to tap into their shared memory and individual capacities to maximize their knowledge, problem solving capabilities, and resilience."

With 5,633 career assists, and over 32,000 points scored, it's clear that Michael Jeffrey Jordan not only learned to pass, he and the Chicago Bulls learned a lot about how teamwork yields sustainable performance.

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Presenter and Panelist:

Marcia Hughes

President

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Marcia Hughes is co-author of the up-coming book, *The Emotionally Intelligent Team* and serves as a strategic communications partner for leaders and teams in organizations that value high performers. She weaves her expertise in emotional intelligence throughout her consulting, facilitation, team building, conflict resolution and workshops to help people motivate themselves and communicate more effectively with others. Her keynotes are built around powerful stories of how success can grow when people work collaboratively and when individuals live with emotional well-being. Marcia's passion is to transform EI theory into sustainable behavioral change. She is co-author of *Emotional Intelligence in Action* (2005) and author of *Life's 2% Solution* (2006). Her inspiration and persistent commitment led the development, promotion, and hosting of Collaborative Growth's International EQ Symposium in 2004. Marcia works with many assessments tools, especially the BarOn family of EQ instruments and the Benchmark of Organizational Emotional Intelligence and certifies trainers in the EQi and EQ 360. Marcia's dedication to improving productivity in the workplace through strategic communications grew out of a distinguished career in law, where her firm specialized in complex public policy matters involving numerous stakeholders. Marcia's has served in a variety of public leadership roles.

Michael Klein, Psy.D.

[Founder of MK Insights](#). MK Insights is a professional and personal development consultancy based in Northampton, Massachusetts. Michael holds a doctorate in clinical psychology and specializes in the use of behavioral tools for sales and consulting practices, including client decision-making and transition planning. He is a member of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the Society for Industrial & Organizational Psychology (SIOP).

Moderator - Joy Kosta

As Director of Talent Development and Leadership Communities at The Human Capital Institute, Joy brings twenty-five years of experience in multiple facets of organizational development, human resources and business management with an emphasis in customer satisfaction, service quality, process improvement, and applying the Malcolm Baldrige Criteria for Performance Excellence. As founder and President of Performance Partners in Health Care, a company dedicated to building better patient experiences, she has authored several curriculums in leadership and staff development, and co-authored with Harold Bursztajn, MD Senior Clinical Faculty member, Harvard Medical School, Building a Treatment Alliance with Patients and Families.

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Community: Talent Development

Track: Emotional Intelligence and Human Capital

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