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Cultivating Positive Project Teams: Accelerating Time to Team Formation

Abstract

High technology project teams must form, innovate, execute and deliver complex solutions at continually increasing speeds to meet market demands. This paper explores how building team positivity, connectedness and efficacy can accelerate team formation and establish an expansive environment for ongoing collaboration and innovation. A program framework for forming positive project teams utilizing empirically-based positive interventions and appreciative inquiry theory is presented. By using appreciative inquiry as a team-development intervention we can help new teams create generative images for themselves based on an affirmative understanding of their past. Team members come together in a safe and encouraging space and get to know each others' strengths, passions, experience and styles while building a vision and action plan for their most positive future. By investing in building positive project teams during team formation, businesses can accelerate team formation, achieve greater team satisfaction and increase overall performance outcomes.

Keywords

Positive project teams, high performing teams, positive psychology, positivity, positive, team, appreciative inquiry, team building

Disciplines

Business Administration, Management, and Operations | Entrepreneurial and Small Business Operations | Human Resources Management | Management Information Systems | Organizational Behavior and Theory | Technology and Innovation

Comments

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Running head: CULTIVATING POSITIVE PROJECT TEAMS

Cultivating Positive Project Teams: Accelerating Time to Team Formation

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August 1, 2009

Abstract

High technology project teams must form, innovate, execute and deliver complex solutions at continually increasing speeds to meet market demands. This paper explores how building team positivity, connectedness and efficacy can accelerate team formation and establish an expansive environment for ongoing collaboration and innovation. A program framework for forming positive project teams utilizing empirically-based positive interventions and appreciative inquiry theory is presented. By using appreciative inquiry as a team-development intervention we can help new teams create generative images for themselves based on an affirmative understanding of their past. Team members come together in a safe and encouraging space and get to know each others' strengths, passions, experience and styles while building a vision and action plan for their most positive future. By investing in building positive project teams during team formation, businesses can accelerate team formation, achieve greater team satisfaction and increase overall performance outcomes.

Introduction

To remain competitive, high tech companies must constantly adapt to new and shifting technologies and rapidly-changing global business environments. Businesses must process exponentially increasing amounts of information, solve highly complex business problems and deliver new products to market at lightning speed. Every day brings new challenges and no one person, however smart and educated, can possess the complete solution. The Internet age has driven the evolution of work groups from static business units to matrixed, dynamic teams. To be successful these dynamic teams of diverse, technically-savvy, globally-disbursed individuals must form quickly to innovate, execute and deliver new products and services in weeks, not months or years. Despite the availability of collaboration and social networking tools, initiating new teams and reaching high performance quickly does not happen consistently, and the result can be higher costs and missed opportunities.

A recent series of articles in *Time* highlights predictions about the nature of the future workforce. Altman (2009) cites a recent report by consulting giant McKinsey & Co. indicating that “85% of new jobs created between 1998 and 2006 involved complex ‘knowledge work’ like complex problem solving and creating corporate strategies.” In the eyes of futurist author Seth Godin (2009), “Work will mean managing a tribe, creating a movement and operating in teams to change the world.” Indications that work will continue its evolution toward higher stress, higher speed and greater flexibility further accentuate the need for novel approaches and increased attention on how we initiate and form teams.

The time is ripe to examine how positive psychology and positive organizational scholarship can be applied to improving the interpersonal dynamics in teams, with a focus on the initial stages of formation. In particular, the spiraling effects of positivity and connectedness

(Losada & Heaphy, 2004; Dutton, 2003) and collective efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Zaccaro, Blair, Peterson, Zazanis, 1995) will be considered to accelerate team formation, achieve greater team satisfaction and increased performance outcomes. I begin this paper by chronicling the evolving role of project teams in business and introducing a common model for small group formation. With this foundation established, I introduce the concept of the *positive project team* and present a review of supporting research. The paper culminates in the recommendation of a program to accelerate team formation through appreciative inquiry and empirically-tested positive interventions. The goal of the *Cultivating a Positive Project Team* program is to position new project teams to quickly achieve high performance by creating a positive team environment, establishing high quality team connections and building collective efficacy.

Chapter One: The Evolving Role of Project Teams in Business

The work of organizations typically falls into two categories: operations and projects. Operations work is ongoing and repetitive, whereas a project can be defined as “a temporary endeavor undertaken to create a unique product or service” (The Project Management Institute, 2004, p. 5). Over most of the last century, companies predominantly accomplished work by large, routine, functionally managed organizations. Product innovations and operational changes took place over years, not months. Most of the work was operational, with large, long term projects chartered to create new products, services, or evolve major operations and supporting systems. These project teams stayed together for multiple years and were mainly co-located. Teams had the time and leadership consistency to develop strong relationships, team norms and behaviors, cohesive work processes and strong identity. Significant time was invested in planning for both the work and the human dynamics of the team. Leaders made more extensive investments in team building efforts: establishing clear vision and goals, holding multi-day team kick off events, conducting extensive planning with high team engagement, establishing clear roles and responsibilities, developing team rituals and celebrations to create a strong identity. While these activities led to strong relationships, team cohesiveness, resiliency and satisfaction, they took significant investment of time and resources to accomplish. Since the teams would be together for long periods of time, the return on investment made sense.

Over the past two decades, there has been a trend towards project orientation in society, industries, and companies (Gareis, 2005; Cleland and Gareis, 2006). According to West et al. (2009), “project teams have become a popular organizational form under circumstances that require coordinated actions toward a non-routine goal” (p. 273). This has been seen in the creative and cultural industries, high technology sector and professional and consulting industries

driven by customer demand for highly differentiated and customized products and services (Sydow et al., 2004).

A Japanese proverb states, “None of us is as smart as all of us.” This illustrates another facet of the evolution of project teams: the increasing interdependency of team members to quickly innovate transformational new products and services, as well as to solve increasingly complex problems. The increasing complexity and integration of business solutions in high technology has led to increased demand for work to be accomplished through project teams. Complex solutions require resources to come together from across the organization, as well as incorporating outside experts and consultants. Teams have become more global and culturally diverse. This has led to the project-oriented organization adopting temporary organizations (project teams) and temporary work processes to accomplish its work, thus creating a dynamic work environment (Turner, Huemann, & Keegan, 2008).

In project-oriented organizations, team members are typically assigned to multiple projects, constantly switching gears between projects throughout the day, as well as having to manage competing demands and simultaneous work peaks. Employee well-being can be a significant issue in these organizations as profit and the act of responding to client demands can take precedence over the needs of the employee. Compounding these challenges is the fact that human resource management practices have not evolved to effectively support the needs of project-oriented organizations (Turner, Huemann, & Keegan, 2008).

Given the evolution toward project-oriented organizations that accomplish their work primarily through small to medium sized projects, new approaches to forming teams are needed to accelerate the time to productivity, increase innovation and develop resiliency to effectively manage the demands of working on multiple, high priority, simultaneous projects. A 2006 poll

by the Center for Creative Leadership showed 83% of the 286 respondents identified teams as a key ingredient to organizational success (CCI, 2006). As employees spend increasing time working in temporary teams, team satisfaction may represent an important variable in employee job satisfaction, ultimately impacting organizational outcomes such as turnover and organizational citizenship (West et al., 2009). All these factors support the need for more effective and expedient methods to establish strong interpersonal team dynamics during team formation.

Chapter Two: Dynamics of Team Formation

Understanding the dynamics of team formation is foundational to considering how positive psychology and positive organizational behavior can help build successful teams. The Tuckman developmental sequence in small groups (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jenson, 1977) has been used throughout team building literature for the last 40 years providing a widely accepted framework for considering the stages of team formation. In his first influential work Tuckman analyzed 50 research articles discussing different types of teams and their developmental sequences to gain an understanding of how small groups develop over time. One of his conclusions identified four key stages in the process of group formation in what he termed the “natural-group setting¹.” Within his model he considered both interpersonal and task behaviors exhibited by the groups. These stages, discussed in detail below include “forming”, “storming”, “norming” and “performing”. In a later analysis Tuckman & Jensen (1977) added a fifth stage, “adjourning”, to acknowledge the importance of the consideration of team endings. While the Tuckman Model may not accurately reflect all team complexities, it has value in providing a simple model for discussing the dynamics of team development.

Forming

The focus of this initial stage is orientation. The team comes together lacking structure, understanding of the work and may have little knowledge of each other. Team members seek to discover what interpersonal behaviors will be acceptable to the group through testing, as well as the nature of the task at hand and how the group will work together to accomplish the task. This is a critical time to build high quality connections (Dutton, 2003) with leaders and between team

¹ Tuckman’s work also considered the stages of team formation in group therapy, human relations training group and laboratory settings. This paper focuses on conclusions that support the natural group setting which he defines as a group in which its members come together in a professional or social setting to do a job.

members. This stage encompasses team members getting to know each others' strengths and weaknesses, understanding their unique attributes, and getting to know each other personally.

Storming

Once the group is formed team members may start to challenge and disagree on how they want to work together and what the nature of the task may be. They may react emotionally in the form of resistance to the demands of the task. Team members can become hostile toward each other as a way of expressing their individuality resulting in a lack of unity within the team. While this stage may be characterized by resistance and conflict, Tuckman considered it critical to developing a shared sense of purpose, performance goals and approach to the work (Katzenbach & Smith, 2003). However, we want to seek alternatives or at least minimize the time spent in this stage and build resilience to prevent return to this stage under adversity.

Norming

At this stage the group forms as an entity and becomes cohesive. Group members accept the group and accept the idiosyncrasies of fellow members. Harmony becomes important to the group and new group-generated standards may be formed to preserve it and to perpetuate the group. Group members become more open toward each other and new roles are adopted.

During the first three stages of the Tuckman Model, most team energy should be invested into activities that bring the group together to form a cohesive, functioning team. Task progress may be minimal during this time. In my experience in the high technology industry, insufficient time and energy may be spent on consciously considering the best way to form teams for successful outcomes. Leaders and teams want to quickly establish a loose vision and then move on to executing the work. Since the management appetite to spend time and energy on

interpersonal activities may be low, we need to identify ways to make these first stages of formation more efficient and effective to accelerate the group to the performing stage.

Performing

At the performing stage the group identity and relationships have formed allowing group members to now assume roles that enhance the performance of the group and focus their energies into the work to be done. The emphasis has shifted from expending energy on group structuring to constructive action on the task at hand. The group is now in a cohesive state. They have clear performance goals, measures of success, accountability and commitment to each other.

Adjourning

In a subsequent study, Tuckman & Jensen (1977) introduced a fifth stage to recognize the importance of separation in the life cycle of the group. While this paper focuses on the forming stages, we should not lose sight of the importance of proper team closure, including knowledge transfer, rewards, recognition and celebration. Team members may have emotions about ending productive work that make transitioning to and forming with a new team challenging. This phase needs to promote effective means of terminating the work and separation from the group. Increased short term project work heightens the need to put emphasis on the phase.

Developing a high performing team is like piloting an airplane. The forming stage is like getting an airplane off the ground. Significant fuel and pilot intervention are required to generate enough energy to get the plane down the run way and to lift off the ground. The cost of error at this stage is high, so careful attention is paid to ensure that everything is operating properly prior to take off. The same is true for teams. I believe the forming stage offers the most impactful place to set a team up for future interpersonal and task success. Successfully transitioning

through the next stages of the Tuckman model depends on the quality of effort applied at this stage.

As our plane is ascending through the atmosphere we may encounter turbulence as we pass through the clouds, in the same way teams may go through a time of storming. It is important to remember that this is normal as conflicting air currents may make the ride bumpy. Once we pass through the clouds we know that the ride will begin to smooth out. As we norm and finally achieve the performing stage, our plane has now reached cruising altitude. The pilot can engage the “auto pilot”; the passengers are free to move about the cabin as we fly seemingly effortlessly across the sky. Pilots continuously monitor the conditions considering alternatives to avoid turbulence in flight. And just as teams need to thoughtfully adjourn, we must ensure our plane has a safe landing at the end of our trip and is fueled and ready for the next flight.

Just as a plane requires speed and fuel to get a plane off the ground, the Tuckman Model highlights the need for initial focus on the interpersonal aspects of the team. This may seem counterintuitive to managers under extreme pressure to execute on the work product of the team. However, research has shown that initial focus on the interpersonal dynamics that influence cohesion and efficacy can help attain and sustain high performance (Gully et al., 2002; Zaccaro, 1995). Building positive emotion creates an environment that may promote the development of team connectedness and efficacy which have been linked to performance outcomes (West et al., 2009). Proper investment upfront can translate to a smoother and more productive ride throughout the project.

Chapter 3 – Building Positive Project Teams

Accelerating the formation of contemporary project teams requires a new, perhaps counter-intuitive, way of thinking about teams. Traditional approaches tend to focus on what's wrong with teams and why they fail, then seek to close the gaps and fix the weaknesses. The July 2009 dinner meeting topic at the Orange County, California Chapter of the Project Management Institute focused on educating the audience on "Why Project Leaders Fail." The speaker reviewed the results of a survey of IT personnel asked to identify the characteristic failures of the worst manager they ever worked for. The Positive Principle of Appreciative Inquiry theory proposes that human beings move in the direction of what they inquire about (Watkins & Mohr, 2001). I find it difficult to imagine that this presentation topic left the audience energized and fulfilled about the prospects of team leadership. The fields of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) and positive organizational scholarship (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003) provide us alternatives: more generative and strength-focused approaches to learning how to build successful, high performing teams.

Positive psychology provides important insights as it seeks to understand what is strong and right in people and figure out how to nurture and grow it, leading to a flourishing life. Peterson (2006) defines positive psychology as the "science of what goes right in life" (p. 4). According to Seligman (2002), "The aim of positive psychology is to catalyze a change in psychology from a preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building the best qualities in life" (p. 3). Building on the foundation of positive psychology, positive organizational scholarship seeks to understand what encompasses and how to attain the best of the human condition in the organizational environment. It seeks to predict the occurrence, causes, and consequences of positivity (Cameron, Dutton & Quinn, 2003).

What Constitutes a Positive Project Team?

Katzenbach (2003) defines a team as “a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable” (p. 45). A “positive” project team moves beyond this definition. I propose that what differentiates a positive project team is an expansive emotional environment that is cultivated by building positivity during the forming stages of the team and transcends through to the way in which the team adjourns. The leader and team members experience and express positive emotions enhancing performance outcomes at the individual and group level (Sy, Cote, Saavedra, 2005; Barsade & Gibson, 2007). They embrace appreciative approaches to working together; focusing on strengths and generative opportunities as opposed to just problems, conflict, defensiveness and win-lose approaches. A positive project team has the characteristics of good morale (Peterson, Park, & Sweeney, 2008) including confidence, enthusiasm, optimism, resilience, mutual trust and respect, loyalty, leadership, and social cohesion.

I led an appreciative inquiry workshop in April 2009 where I invited 37 project managers to inquire into cultivating positive project teams. The project managers explored the following appreciative questions during their interviews:

Reflect on a positive team experience; a time when you felt a sustained period of positive emotion, when you were inspired to partner with your teammates and work for the good of the whole, when you felt fulfilled and at peak performance. What was happening on the team, with your teammates and the leader? What was the team climate like?

Some of the positive core themes that emerged from the group discussions included: cohesiveness, open communication and collaboration, recognition, humor, innovative thinking, creativity, authenticity, confidence in the team, mutual respect, meaning, passion and purpose.

For these project managers, this generative workshop approach not only gave them a vision of positive project teams to strive toward, but also helped them identify creative and positive new ways to help their teams achieve this vision. The project managers reported an increase in their own positivity and could see how working in a more positively-focused environment could be beneficial to them as individuals and to their teams' performance.

Creating this type of team environment requires focus and effort on building positive emotion and establishing team norms that can be initiated at the very earliest stages of team formation, leading to the development of the characteristics that lead to high team performance. I will consider the impact of positive emotion, as well as the constructs of connectivity and collective efficacy on team formation.

Laying the Foundation: The Role of Positive Emotions

To flourish means to live within an optimal range of human functioning, one that connotes goodness, generativity, growth, and resilience (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). Empirical research by Fredrickson and others has increased our understanding of the physiological and psychological power of positive emotions. The positivity ratio (Fredrickson, 2001) reflects the ratio of pleasant feelings and sentiments to unpleasant ones over time. This ratio of positive to negative affect has been shown to be a key predictor of flourishing in individuals and teams (Fredrickson, 2001; Losada, 1999) and provides a useful measure for baselining and measuring the impact of team building interventions on the emotional climate of the developing team.

The broaden-and-build theory suggests that positive emotions (positivity) broaden people's attention and thinking and, in turn, build durable personal, social, intellectual, psychological resources in an upward spiral toward well-being (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002, Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). For example, the positive emotion of *joy* creates an urge to play

and be creative, *interest* the urge to explore, and *contentment* the urge to savor and integrate (Fredrickson, 1998, Fredrickson, 2001). Given this broadening and building effect, we can increase our positivity ratio by building positive emotions through self-awareness and disciplined action. We can also increase the positivity ratio by reducing negative emotion. Losada & Heaphy (2005) demonstrated a tipping point: exceeding a 3:1 positivity ratio indicates flourishing in the individual. But can we have too much of a good thing? Their research suggests that the dynamics of flourishing begin to disintegrate with positivity ratios beyond 11:1. The importance of balancing appropriate positivity and negativity is discussed later in the paper.

How does this effect transcend from individuals to teams? Fredrickson and Losada combined experimental and descriptive research to demonstrate the impact of positivity on human flourishing (Fredrickson, 2001; Losada, 1999). Losada observed over 60 management teams and defined “high performing” teams as demonstrating high profitability, high customer satisfaction, and high evaluations by superiors, peer, and subordinates (Losada & Heath 2004). He observed teams by capturing statements made during business meetings and coding them on three dimensions: positive affect / negative affect; self-focused / other-focused; and inquiry orientation / advocacy orientation. As Losada observed (Losada & Heaphy, 2004), “By showing appreciation and encouragement to other members of the team, they created emotional spaces that were expansive and opened possibilities for action and creativity as shown in their strategic mission statements” (p. 749). Characteristics of high performing teams showed high levels of other-focused & inquiry-based statements, and a positivity ratio of about 6:1 (Losada & Heaphy, 2004). In organizations, the spiraling effect of positivity may not only be upwards, but also outward, “infusing, connecting, and energizing whole networks, communities and organizations” (Fredrickson & Dutton, 2008, p. 1).

For example, I work with an IT project leader who began cultivating her own positive emotion through reframing her thoughts, focusing on solutions rather than problems, and making it her mission to be of service to her team. People around her began emulating her behavior which not only improved the morale of the team, but also reinforced her belief in herself and her direction. Her team became more productive and established better relationships with their peers and clients. In a recent company survey measuring employee engagement, 95% of her team rated themselves as highly engaged in their work. She is now working with senior leaders in the organization to replicate her team approach across their IT organization.

While Fredrickson grounded her work in evolutionary theory, Losada represents the dynamics of flourishing teams using mathematical theory. He demonstrated that the behavior of business teams represents a nonlinear dynamic system – the factors measured showed reciprocal causality leading to an upward spiral of positive results. Losada's math predicts that 1) positivity aligns with asking questions (inquiry) and focusing outward; 2) team connectivity increases as positivity increases; 3) higher positivity leads to greater team resilience; 4) positivity correlates positively with business success (Fredrickson 2009; Staw, Sutton, & Pelled 1994; West, et. al., 2009).

Research has demonstrated additional effects of positive emotion on teams. A meta analysis (Lyubomirsky, et al., 2005) showed positive affect was associated with an individual's active involvement with goal pursuits and with their environment. When people experience happiness, they take a more open stance; willing to work with together with others to solve issues rather than being protective and defensive. Barsade & Gibson (2007) showed positive affect influenced critical organizational outcomes including teamwork, job performance,

decision making and creativity. Positive emotion influences creativity² by creating a state where more cognitive resources are available for processing and facilitating more complex and flexible thinking (Amabile, et al., 2007; Fredrickson, 1998; Isen, 1999). Emotional contagion³ not only positively influenced people's moods, but also subsequent group dynamics (Barsade, 2002). In addition, Barsade (2002) showed that positive emotional contagion decreased conflict, improved cooperation and increased task performance. Results of these studies support the hypothesis that increasing positive emotion can accelerate the forming and storming phases of team development.

The Undoing Effects of Positive Emotions

The economic downturn heightens the need to raise positivity on teams. A recent study of 50 major corporations (Corporate Executive Board, 2009) showed an increase in the level of disengaged employees from 8% to 21% over the last three quarters. Project teams are challenged to cope with layoffs, budget cutbacks, unfavorable economic news, and increasing pressure to produce more with less. This is a time when high engagement is more important than ever. The work environment can be quite somber and negative making it even more difficult to bring together and motivate a new team. In addition to the effects of positive emotions on broadening and building resources, research has demonstrated that positive emotions may also help regulate and undo negative emotions (Fredrickson, et al., 2000). This has important implications for teams that must quickly re-form due to restructuring and layoffs that result from economic downturn.

Balancing Positive and Negative Emotion

² Amabile defines creativity as coming up with fresh ideas for changing products, services, and processes so as to achieve the organization's goals.

³ Barsade defines emotional contagion as processes that allow the sharing or transferring of emotions from one individual to other group members, often occurring without conscious knowledge and can be consciously induced.

So why not teach teams to be positive all the time? While positive emotions broaden us to make us more creative and connected to others, is this always appropriate? According to evolutionary theory, we were given negative emotions to ensure our survival as a species (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005). Losada & Heaphy (2004) discuss the need for grounded positivity where negative feedback is important to keep the team focused and on track. When a deadline is approaching, stress can be important to narrowing the team to focus on specific actions to be taken. However since people tend to be impacted by an entropic gravitational pull toward the negative (i.e., a negativity bias) (Baumeister, et. al., 2001), team leaders and members need to understand the impact of negative emotions on team outcomes and become aware of creating the appropriate team climate. Even during team formation, the pressure of having a compelling task to accomplish as a team will build interdependency between team members and cause them to collectively focus on finding solution (Katzenbach & Smith, 2003).

Building Team Connectivity

The growing complexity of solutions requires teams to operate more interdependently, approaching work from a “we” perspective as opposed to a “me” perspective. In some applications, a gymnastics team for example, a leader can set the direction for the team and the success of the team will depend on the skills and contributions of the individual team members. On the contrary, on technology solution projects, success comes from the development of collective work products (Katzenbach & Smith, 2001) where the integrated skills, talents and knowledge of the team members must come together; the sum of the parts is more than the whole. Collective work teams have an even greater need for an expansive emotional environment given the amount of interdependent work that must be done. Without solid formation from the

start, even the most talented individuals may not gel as a team; selecting the most skilled and experienced individuals is not enough.

My daughter's high school soccer team provides an example that illustrates the importance of a connected team over the independent actions of talented individuals. The coach selected the members of the team from champion soccer club teams; each girl extremely talented in her own right. Surprisingly, they never won a game as the team. The team never properly formed, failing to develop the camaraderie and shared commitment to connect as a team. The mood on the team remained negative throughout the season, including the mood of the parents; a downward spiral of negative emotion. Successful teams need the best players and an environment that fosters connectivity and cohesion.

One aspect of building team connectivity is developing high quality connections between team members. High quality connections are marked by mutual positive regard, trust, and active engagement (Dutton, 2003). Establishing trust is critical at the forming stage of team development as trust is foundational to an environment that allows storming to occur. Lencioni (2002), consultant and author, defines trust as "the confidence among team members that their peers' intentions are good and there is no reason to be protective or careful around the group" (p. 195). Put another way, trusting involves acting on positive expectations about how other people will behave and what their intentions toward us are (Dutton, 2003). By trusting others, we allow ourselves to be vulnerable, which in turn builds their trust in us leading to increased connectivity of the team.

According to Losada & Heaphy (2004), "the durable psychological and social resources are the strength and quantity of the connections (nexi) among team members" (p. 760). Beyond fostering trust, having strong, meaningful, and mutually empowering connections supports

growth, development and learning (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). Connectivity allows individuals to get to know each others' strengths, past experience, passion and preferred work styles. People become more vulnerable. Rather than trying to "do it all" themselves, they become willing to grow through feedback and partner with others in non-strength areas. A better awareness of team members' strengths positions team members to play complementary roles. This allows team members to use their strengths more often further increasing team effectiveness and employee engagement (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Further, knowing and taking advantages of each other's strengths can contribute toward the team's belief in its possibility of success.

The role of Self Efficacy and Collective Efficacy

Team success must begin at the individual level. Team members need to possess the self-determination, self-regulation and efficacy to accomplish their role on the team. We have the ability to actively shape our lives by taking an "I'll see it when I believe it" approach. Believing that we can accomplish what we want to is another key ingredient in the recipe for success (Maddux 2002). In a meta-analysis conducted by Stajkovic & Luthans (1998), a significant average weighted correlation was demonstrated between self-efficacy and work-related performance, showing a greater gain in performance than goal setting, feedback interventions or organizational behavior modification. This supports the notion that if you don't believe you can accomplish something, you may not reach your full potential.

Self-efficacy beliefs develop over time and through experience in a self-propagating manner – self-efficacy leads to success which in turns leads to more self-efficacy. Self-efficacy beliefs influence self-regulation in several ways. If we are confident in our abilities we will set more challenging goals, select appropriate actions to achieve those goals, and demand higher expectations for achievement. Even following failure, those high in self-efficacy will strive

harder to establish new challenging goals and strategies for achievement. We will enhance our self-regulation by producing adaptive emotional states and be more likely to persevere in the face of challenges. As we demonstrate this self-control and perseverance we give others confidence in our ability to effectively contribute to team success.

At an individual level, self-efficacy plays a major role in the self-regulation of emotions leading to higher emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence skills allow humans to perceive, understand and manage emotions in themselves and others through effective integration of emotion and cognition (Salovey, Caruso, and Mayor 2004). Building emotional intelligence, in turn, strengthens self-efficacy from a personal and collective social perspective because teams now possess the social skills that lead to increased social competence, better interpersonal relationships and higher connectivity. We are better able to develop high quality connections.

Believing that we can accomplish what we want to is a key ingredient in the recipe for success for individuals and teams. Collective efficacy represents a team's belief that they can work together to accomplish shared goals (Maddux 2002). Collective efficacy extends beyond the individual theory of self-efficacy and is defined as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment," (Bandura, 1977, p. 476). If a team is more confident in its abilities it will set more challenging goals, select appropriate actions to achieve those goals, and demand higher expectations for achievement. Connectivity enables this confidence by helping individuals know each other's capabilities and find complementary ways to work together. Team efficacy has been shown to positively affect team performance (Knight, Durham & Locke, 2001, Zaccaro et al., 1995).

Considering the example of my daughter's soccer team, their success was achievable only through interdependent efforts. While they may have possessed individual efficacy and personal agency, their lack of interactive, coordinative, and synergistic dynamics may have limited their ability to perform as a cohesive unit (Bandura, 2000), illustrating the concept that collective efficacy is not simply the sum of the efficacy beliefs of the individual members. Addressing individual development alone will not yield the desired results when the product of the team depends on coordinated, interdependent efforts.

Drawing from the conclusions of Losada and Heaphy's (2005) research, collective efficacy may contribute to higher positivity, raise the synergistic and creative abilities of the team, build social resources, and lead to higher team performance. By considering interventions that increase collective efficacy, connectedness and positivity together, especially at team initiation, positive momentum can be built right from the start. This potentially shortens the time to productivity and improves the quality of the overall results of the team. The next chapter presents an interactive program for cultivating positive project teams.

Chapter 4 – Cultivating a Positive Project Team

“We need to have teams within organizations that are able to tap into the liberating and creative power of positivity,” (Losada and Heath, 2004, p762). Open-mindedness, synergistic thinking and resilience are critical to creating complex business solutions in today’s high pressure, fast-paced environment. According to West et al. (2009), training directed at team level capacities, above and beyond the training of individuals, may provide unique benefits, especially if the training can be conducted while they are operating as a team. According to the results of their study, organizations may benefit from developing teams that are “optimistic about their likelihood of success (optimism), are confident in their capabilities (efficacy), and are capable of rebounding from setbacks (resilience).”

The proposed program presents one approach to increase the level of collective positivity in new teams to accelerate building team trust, optimism, connectedness and efficacy, leading to an increased sense of interdependency and team identity. The program combines empirically tested interventions and the Appreciative Inquiry methodology to inquire into the strengths of the new team and create collective images of its best possible outcomes and team environment.

Watkins & Mohr (2001) describes Appreciative Inquiry (AI) as a “collaborative and highly participative, system-wide approach to seeking, identifying, and enhancing the ‘life-giving forces’ that are present when a system is performing optimally in human, economic, and organizational terms” (p. 14). Appreciative Inquiry “refers to both a search for knowledge and a theory of intentional collective action which are designed to help evolve the normative vision and will of a group, organization or society as a whole” (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1997, p. 159). The underlying foundation of Appreciative Inquiry is rooted in theoretical principles and research. AI employs storytelling, affirmative dialogue and generative questioning that can help

teams discover their positive core and create positive images for their future. The theory is based on five core principles (Constructionist, Simultaneity, Anticipatory, Poetic, and Positive) and four core processes (Discover, Dream, Design, Destiny⁴). Organizations move in the direction of what they study and Appreciative Inquiry makes a conscious choice to study the best of an organization, its positive core (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008). By inviting teams to study the essence of positive project teams, we position them to create a positive project team.

AI has been found to be an effective method for building new teams. A controlled experiment by Bushe & Coetzer (1995) supported their hypothesis that AI is an effective team development intervention. Especially relevant to team formation is Cooperrider's heliotropic hypothesis which extends that like plants, people will move toward the "light", that which is generative and life giving. By involving the forming team in collective efforts to understand their strengths and create their images of the future, they can more quickly transition through the Tuckman stages, perhaps even reducing the storming phase from a potential hurricane to a brief shower, if at all. Appreciative Inquiry provides alternatives to storming; more positive methods for establishing team identity and group norms. The learnings from an appreciative inquiry workshop can transfer to the ongoing dynamics of the team creating a more expansive, positive environment focused on possibilities rather than deficits.

To help teams immediately focus on their positive future, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) forms the core of this program. New teams are taken through a series of workshops that align to the AI 4D cycle with the focus on building team vision around how to achieve exceptional team performance in a positive team environment. The program employs an initial positive psychology intervention, the Positive Introduction (Peterson, 2006), aimed at helping new team

⁴ For the purposes of this program, we will use the term "Deploy" in place of Destiny as this is presumed to be more palatable in the corporate environment.

members get to know each other and establish a level of trust needed to be open to the body of the program activities.

The elements of the program may be combined into a one day session or run independently of each other, although each module is intended to build toward the next. An important consideration in designing this program is that team members take away tools and techniques that they can continue to utilize beyond their time in the program.

The program contains six elements, including four workshops which could be used independently or combined into one full day or multi-day program. The program is intended to be delivered with the team co-located at one site although it could be modified to be delivered in a virtual environment. The program framework and basic exercises are discussed below and delivery can be found in Appendix A.

- Pre-Program Assessment
- Program Pre-Work Assignment
- Workshop 1: Getting to Know Our Team Members
- Workshop 2: Discovering Our Team's Positive Core
- Workshop 3: Imagining Our Positive Project Team
- Workshop 4: Designing and Deploying Our Positive Project Team

Pre-Program Assessment

We must consider the needs and culture of the audience when determining interventions to reap the maximum benefit. Positive interventions are not “one size fits all.” Setting the stage for sustained positive change begins by cultivating awareness and attention to change. According to William James (1890/1981), “My experience is what I agree to attend to” (p. 380). Each team works in a unique environment and faces its own set of challenges and opportunities. Program

facilitators need to work with team sponsors and leaders to configure the positive team interventions to achieve the results that are meaningful to each unique team.

Participants gain maximum benefit when exercises are relevant (Lyubomirsky, 2007). By conducting stakeholder interviews prior to the program, the exercises can be customized to have optimal meaning and relevance, helping team members to fully engage rather than resist. The stakeholder interview seeks to discover the reason this team has been formed; the ultimate objectives of the team, key stakeholders, and timeframe for project completion. Additionally, the interview will discover existing team dynamics; how long has the team been together, have these team members worked together in the past, key strengths to build on or barriers to address. According to Katzenback & Smith (2003), team formation accelerates when the team has a near term goal to achieve. The interview also strives to identify a near term collective work product that requires the combined skills, talents and perspectives of the team that can be incorporated into the program.

When working with a global team, the facilitator should consider the variable cultural norms of all participants. While one culture may be comfortable discussing their achievements and challenges openly, other cultures could be offended. In my experience, the cultural aspect of private versus public space is very different between Americans and Western Europeans; Americans have a very large public space and Western Europeans have a very small public space. For example, at a recent workshop ice breaker at my company, the facilitator asked team members to talk about a moment that “moved them.” The Europeans talked about winning soccer matches and rugby tournaments, the Americans talked about relatives dying. The meeting derailed because some members became somber and unfocused and some frustrated as they did not understand the purpose of the exercise. This example illustrates the importance of

understanding the needs and customs of the audience. Based on information gathered in the assessment, the topic of inquiry and format is customized to best suit the organizational and cultural needs of the team.

Program Pre-Work Assignment

Teams often come together and begin working without getting to know each others' strengths, passions, experience and styles. The goal of this pre-work is to orient participants to the program and help the team get to know each other by creating a brief profile that will be used during and after the workshop. Program participants receive a worksheet prior to the program to be completed and submitted prior to attending the program. The program facilitator compiles the collective information into a roster that can be distributed in hard copy and/or be incorporated into a team website or wiki for future reference. Participants will utilize their Positive Introduction in the first exercise of the program.

- *Positive Introduction* – participants will be asked to write a brief story that depicts them at their best in a project team environment.
- *3 Little Known Facts* – to further help people to get to know team members on a professional and/or personal level
- *Style and expertise profile* – to capture important elements of the participants style, passion and expertise

Participants may also be asked to complete pre-assessments to measure level of positivity and collective efficacy prior to the program.

Program Welcome & Orientation

The program opens with an overview of the purpose and desired outcomes for the program. An opening statement by a project executive sponsor or the team leader establishes

support for the approach and set expectations for the team. A quick appreciative icebreaker is used to raise positive energy, introducing the first team takeaway for use beyond the program.

Following the icebreaker, a brief introduction to the principles and research in positive psychology and supporting theory of AI will expand participant knowledge and build credibility of the program. Participant buy in to the process will improve its effectiveness (Lyubomirsky, 2007). The stages of group development and dynamics of how groups form provide a framework to anchor the exercises as we move through the program. Lastly, the group identifies positive ways of working together during the program. The concept of appreciative listening (Peterson, 2006) is introduced to help the participants learn to listen carefully and openly to what is being said and then respond in a way that builds as opposed to disagreeing or contradicting. The facilitator invites the team to generate other positive ways that they can collaborate during the program and these will be captured for reference during and after the program.

Workshop 1: Getting to Know Our Team Members

The first workshop focuses participants on beginning to understand and connect with each other as individuals and recognize the strengths on the team. The Positive Introduction exercise (Peterson 2006) provides a simple, yet powerful way for team members to get to know each other quickly, as well as build positivity and team efficacy. The goal of this exercise is to accelerate the forming stage (Tuckman, 1965) of group development through establishing initial trust and connectedness. Creating a safe, appreciative space will be critical for participants to feel comfortable to speak authentically during this exercise.

As part of the program pre-work each team member prepares a brief introduction answering an appreciative question about an aspect of their experience working on project teams.

This question⁵ gives them the opportunity to highlight a project team experience they are especially proud of, closing with a powerful ending. The experience documented should exemplify their strengths, highlight a previous success and help others get to know them. By reading or summarizing the introduction to the team, they will not only increase the positivity and efficacy of the team, but themselves as well. Collective results expected would include increased team collaboration, openness to others' ideas, increased team satisfaction and efficacy, as well as reduced time to team productivity by understanding how to leverage each other's strengths. Greater creativity during the program will be possible due to the synergistic space that is created during this exercise.

Method of application depends on the size of the team attending the workshop. This exercise should take no more than an hour, so teams may be split into subgroups of four or six participants for sharing their introductions⁶. Each participant is given three to five minutes to read or summarize their introduction. The other members of the group will help the participant savor the story by discussing what strengths they heard. This reinforces the group members' learning about their teammates. After everyone has shared their stories, a full group debrief will highlight positive learnings and ask the group to consider how they can apply this now and on future teams.

Workshop 2: Discovering Our Team's Positive Core

The goal of the second workshop builds on the Positive Introduction by further identifying the positive core of the team. According to the AI Simultaneity principle, inquiry and change are not distinct; they happen in parallel and inquiry itself is an intervention. The first questions we ask set the stage for what we will discover. By beginning with an inquiry into

⁵ The specific appreciative question will be tailored based on the assessment interview.

⁶ All positive introductions will be available for everyone to read in the Team Roster document.

stories of positive and generative aspects of team member's past team experiences, as well as their wishes for the future, we create heliotropic images that bring energy and inspiration to the team.

The team is divided into interview partners and given a set of focused appreciative questions to inquire into their positive past, presents values and wishes for the future. The pairs conduct interviews and then come together in small groups to share their stories and identify positive themes that bring energy, root causes of success and wishes for the future. The teams post their most energizing themes and align visually to create an image of the positive core of the team. Through this initial image the team begins to see the potential they have to build upon. They also continue building high quality connections.

This exercise combines learning about the individual abilities of the team and continues to build the collective efficacy of the team through the identification of the collective positive core. Accomplishing important goals in groups depends on the ability of team members to identify teammates' abilities and then harness these abilities to accomplish common goals (Maddux, 2002). In addition, revealing the positive core provides a sustainable source of positive energy for both personal and team transformation (Cooperrider, Whitney & Stavros, 2008).

Workshop 3: Imagining Our Positive Project Team

This workshop engages the team in collective action to build creative and innovative possibilities of what the team can be; an image of their preferred future. This image builds directly from the stories and resulting themes identified in the previous Discovery workshop. The goal for this workshop is to create a space for the team to be as creative as possible. The opening exercise in this workshop raises positive energy by generating excitement for what can be. The workshop begins with a guided visualization or a visionary team video that creates a compelling

and desirable image to “prime the pump” of the team’s imagination. Following the visualization, a set of provocative, customized focal questions that link the visualization to the direction of the team prepares them for rich and creative dialogues. Appropriate questions help the team think about high quality connections within the team and outside stakeholders considering how information is shared, how decisions are made, the nature of leadership, how people collaborate on ideas, etc. It is this connection between the past and the future that makes AI different from other visioning or planning methodologies (Mohr and Watkins, 2001).

After a chance for personal reflection, small groups dialogue on possibilities for the future drawing on their personal reflections as well as the future wishes collected from the Discovery workshop. Each group develops a creative way to practice living in the future they most desire – a song, skit, poem, drawing etc. As each group presents their image of the future, the rest of the team members provide inspirational feedback. Through these performance, imaginal and vicarious experiences, positive energy and collective efficacy⁷ increases. The team identity emerges as the team discusses and captures common future themes.

Workshop 4: Designing and Deploying Our Positive Project Team

A Japanese proverb states, “Vision without action is a day dream.” While vision is powerful, vision without action will not help the team realize their imagined positive project team. This workshop guides the team to determine what the team will be and identify individual and group actions that make their most compelling possibilities a reality. The groups translate their visual depictions of positive project teams into creative, innovative possibility statements (provocative propositions). These statements serve to integrate the best of the past with the possibility of the future while remaining consistent with the intended outcome of the inquiry

⁷ Strategies for increasing self-efficacy include performance experience, verbal persuasion, vicarious experience and imaginal experience (Maddux 2002). I am drawing from this research to extend these conclusions from the individual to the team.

(Cooperrider et al., 2008). These statements should challenge the team beyond the status quo and challenge common assumptions, and at the same time, be grounded in what has worked in the past.

Once the team has selected its most energizing possibility statements, the team must determine how to make the vision a reality; what individual and group actions must be taken now and in the future? Having concrete, energizing goals and pathways to attain those goals serves to bond the team further by establishing a co-created identity and clear roles for the individuals and the group as a whole. In the last phase of this workshop the team documents a plan including action steps, ownership and timing.

Program Wrap Up & Closing

The program culminates in an end to end process review and a group discussion to celebrate and savor the work the team has completed. Participants have the opportunity to discuss their lessons learned, what they appreciated about the approach and what techniques they can employ going forward to keep the team environment energized with an appropriate level of positivity. The team has an opportunity to recognize any group behaviors that have helped the group align to the attributes they have identified that describe their ideal positive project team.

Measurement Strategy

Ensuring a meaningful experience for participants and results that positively impact business performance is important to delivering a successful program. As discussed, positivity has been shown to be a predictor of team connectivity, resilience and business success, and team efficacy has been shown to positively affect team performance. The program measurement strategy focuses on measuring three dimensions: the constructs of positivity and collective efficacy, as well as participant satisfaction with the program itself.

Positivity

The positivity ratio will be used to measure the level of positive to negative affect across the group. The Positive Affect Negative Affect Schedule (PANAS) (Watson, Clark, Tellegen, 1988) can be used to assess individual levels of positive and negative affect. This assessment has been shown to be reliable, valid and efficient and supports calculation of the positivity ratio for each team member. The results can then be compiled to assess the levels across the team both before and after the program, as well as at a future date. Another measurement option is to utilize the positivity assessment online at <http://www.positivityratio.com>.

Collective Efficacy

Measurement of perceived collective efficacy can be approached from two different perspectives depending on the nature of the work of the team (Bandura, 2000). For situations where the team achieves results primary through the combined independent members of the team, an approach where the results of individual self efficacy assessments are compiled may be effective in assessing the overall perceived efficacy of the team. With highly interdependent teams, such as teams focused on achieving complex business solutions, collective efficacy may more effectively be evaluated as an emergent group level property (Bandura, 2000). People's shared beliefs in their collective efficacy influence their commitment to collective action, effort they contribute to the group, and their reliance under adversity. An aggregated holistic index is more useful to understand each individual's perceptions of the likelihood of group success. Assessment questions will be developed to allow each participant to rate their level of personal efficacy, as well as their perceived capability of the group to achieve its goals as a collective team.

Program Satisfaction

An anonymous survey will be developed to gather demographic information about each participant and assess their satisfaction with the program from a personal, team and organizational perspective. Some open-ended questions will also gain their insights into what worked well and where improvements can be made to the materials, as well as the program delivery.

Conclusion

High technology project teams must form, innovate, execute and deliver complex solutions at continually increasing speeds to meet market demands. Positivity, connectivity and collective efficacy have been positively correlated to team satisfaction and positive team outcomes. By building these team capacities we can accelerate team formation and establish a more expansive team environment for ongoing collaboration and innovation.

The proposed program framework, *Cultivating Positive Project Teams*, can be customized and implemented to jump start a positive, expansive environment in new project teams. By using appreciative inquiry as a team-development intervention we can help new teams create generative images for themselves based on an affirmative understanding of their past. Team members come together in a safe and encouraging space and get to know each others' strengths, passions, experience and styles while building a vision and action plan for their most positive future.

By investing in building positive project teams during team formation, businesses can accelerate team formation, achieve greater team satisfaction and increase overall performance outcomes.

Appendix A – Program Outline

This outline presents an approach to deliver the program in one day, with the team co-located at the same site. This program can be modified to be delivered over multiple days, as well as in a virtual environment.

Time	Activity	Desired Outcome
	<p>Preparations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Arrange room in tables of 6 (or 4 if group is small. If tables are not available, arrange chairs in circles. 2. Have extra areas or rooms available where pairs can do interviews 3. Make copies of handouts and have slides loaded 4. Supplies <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Two adhesive flip charts & easels b. Markers c. PC with PowerPoint and screen. Projector & screen d. Name Tags or table tents (if participants don't know each other) e. 4 x 6 Postits 5. Handouts <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Assessments b. Participant Workbook c. Evaluation 6. Charts <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Team Strengths b. Positive Core c. Possibility Map d. Team Actions 	<p>Preparations for workshop</p>
<p>00:00 – 01:00 60 Minutes</p>	<p>Welcome and Overview</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Introduction of Facilitator(s) 2. Executive or team leader opens the workshop to show support and set expectations 3. Purpose & agenda for the Workshop 	<p>Participants understand the purpose of the workshop</p> <p>Establish leadership support for the approach</p>

Time	Activity	Desired Outcome
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Warm Up Exercise 5. Positive Team Overview Presentation 6. Discussion and capture of guidelines of engagement for the workshop 	<p>Participants understand the framework for how teams form and the science and evidence for positivity, connectedness & team efficacy</p> <p>Create positive energy in the room</p>
01:00 – 02:00 60 Minutes	<p>Workshop 1: Getting to Know Our Team Members</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Participants summarize their positive introduction story, highlighting their strengths to the full group or small group depending on team size 2. Debrief by discussing the diverse strengths of the collective team. 3. Participants post a top strength on the Team Strengths chart 4. Participants note key take-aways in their workbook 5. Acknowledge the power of the diverse strengths and experiences of the team 	<p>Build interpersonal connection, trust and efficacy through storytelling and learning about each others' strengths</p>
02:00 – 03:00 60 Minutes	<p>Workshop 2: Discovering our Team's Positive Core</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Appreciative paired interviews on high point stories of team experience (specific topic of discovery & questions to be tailored to the needs of each team) 2. Small group discussion of compelling stories and root causes of success 3. Each group reads out on most positive and inspiring 3 – 5 themes; posts and affinitizes on the Positive Core chart 	<p>Discover the positive core themes of past high performing teams</p> <p>Raise positivity through telling of exceptional team stories</p> <p>Identify the life-giving forces of positive, high performing teams</p> <p>Identify hopes for the future</p>
03:00 – 04:00 60 Minutes	<p>LUNCH</p> <p>Use last 15 minutes to reconvene with an energizer that illustrates the power of appreciative questioning and responding</p>	

Time	Activity	Desired Outcome
04:00 – 06:00 120 Minutes	<p>Workshop 3: Imagining Our Positive Project Team</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Set the stage through a customized full group guided visioning or a video of effective team dynamics 2. Individuals do personal reflection on this vision and future wishes from the Discovery guided by a relevant focal question 3. Small groups dialogue on possibilities for the future and develop a creative way to depict their vision: a song, skit, drawing, poem, day in the life, etc. 4. Groups present their visions to the larger group. 5. Volunteers give affirmations of the presenting group’s ideas and approach after each presentation 6. Debrief on common themes and threads and post on flip chart 	<p>Build a creative & innovative vision of a high-performing, fulfilling project team by identifying the most enlivening and exciting opportunities for the success of the team</p> <p>Build team identity and commitment to the team and the vision</p> <p>Build cohesion as the teams work together to build their vision for the future</p> <p>Build team optimism</p>
06:00 – 07:00 60 minutes	<p>Workshop 4: Designing and Deploying Our Positive Project Team</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Groups translate their visual images into possibility statements 2. Select 1 – 3 most creative and innovative group possibility statements 3. Groups brainstorm on what actions the team can take to make these possibilities a reality considering people, organization, culture, processes and environment 4. Groups read out and post possibility statements and actions on the Possibility map 5. Individuals reflect on personal commitments, requests and offers to implement the team vision 	<p>Build hope for team success through developing goals and pathways to making a successful, positive team a reality</p> <p>Create group action plan</p> <p>Create individual action plans</p> <p>Transfer learnings from the workshop to the workplace</p>

Time	Activity	Desired Outcome
07:00 – 08:00 60 minutes	Program Wrap Up <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Review the end to end program process and results 2. Celebration of accomplishment 3. Participants share commitments, requests and offers 4. Final discussion to recap learnings and reactions to the workshop 5. Participants complete evaluation and post-workshop assessments 	<p>Team commitment to making the team vision a reality</p> <p>Identification of new positive team behaviors to bring forward as team norms</p> <p>Evaluation of participant satisfaction and program impact</p>

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