

Chapter 14

Building and Developing Well-Functioning Teams—The Impact of Transformative Communication

Congruence or genuineness involves letting the other person know “where you are” emotionally. It may involve confrontation and the straightforward expression of personally owned feelings—both negative and positive. Thus congruence is a basis for living together in a climate of realness.

Carl Rogers (1980, p. 160)

This chapter focuses on the following:

- Characteristics of well-functioning teams;
- Resources for transforming communication in:
 - Job interviews;
 - Decision-making;
- Case examples and reflective dialogue;
- The function of self-organizing principles and effects of drawing on them;
- The people-oriented agenda in teamwork.

14.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the team as social and professional enabler for any collaborative task is in the foreground. First, the characteristics of well-functioning teams are investigated. Subsequently, we share insights on the hiring process as an essential step in building “healthy,” happy, and productive teams. Another ubiquitous task in working with a team is decision-making. In order to help mastering this complex challenge, a few vignettes of decision-making situations with or in teams will be presented, observed, and reflected upon, aiming at facilitating experiential learning. Finally, we investigate how the people-oriented agenda can be put to work in teams that excel on the task- as well as people-oriented level.

14.2 Characteristics of Well-Functioning Teams

Earlier, we introduced the two-agenda approach to meetings and other key situations in management and leadership. In this chapter, we extend it to teams. These, too, can be considered to work at a task-specific level and a basic, people-oriented level. Both are interdependent and tightly intertwined (Johnson and Johnson 1975/2006). In this work, however, we chose to focus our attention on the people-oriented aspects and assume that the required task- or job-related skills are covered by the team members such that they are provided in the team as a whole and allow the team to competently handle the task at hand. This means that, for example, the crew of an aircraft would have members who can competently deal with the list of activities they are expected to handle, such as admitting passengers, flying and landing the aircraft, storing cabin luggage safely, serving refreshments, dealing with the technology on board, and making announcements. This task-oriented level is more apparent than the people-oriented one that often lies hidden but cannot be ignored if the team is to take on any responsibility. The people-oriented level or agenda in a team could be compared with the “energy system” in the team that delivers energy and impulses to the whole team and its members to stimulate one other and act in concert.

High-performing teams whose members enjoy their team confirm what Maureen O’Hara witnessed in person-centered encounter groups.

When groups can provide the necessary conditions for each of their members to become fully present to themselves and each other, the group’s capacity for self-organizing emerges, and when the individuals also begin to tune into and reflect on the workings of the whole, we consider that a form of consciousness. At this stage, the group may become capable of exquisitely creative, responsible, and wise collective action that goes well beyond that of any of the particular individual participants within the group. (O’Hara 2003, p. 74)

Apparently, in a work context, the phrase “to become fully present to themselves and each other” would need to be complemented by also becoming coherent with the organization’s or project’s goals such that there is a flow between the people as well each person’s professional function and their personal striving.

Appreciating that well-functioning teams are a reality, indeed, it is tempting to ask: What is it that supports a group of people to function well together and achieve shared goals?

Based on the literature research and Renate’s empirical research (Motschnig-Pitrik 2006, 2008, 2013) and experience in working in and with teams, as well as influenced by intensive conversations with Godfrey Barrett-Lennard and Ladislav Nykl, we suggest the following as a preliminary response to the question: How can we form a team in which mutual growth and unfolding of our team are prevalent while some task or project is being accomplished? Team members, including the leader, in particular:

- Are as open as appropriate to their experience as well the others' experience. They welcome experience as a source of growth and promote it appropriately → *openness to one's own and others' experience*;
- Feel an active, genuine interest in the project, the others, and the ensuing relationships. This is expressed in transparent sharing of ideas, meanings, feelings, goals, work, reactions, etc., whenever deemed appropriate → *sharing*;
- Aim to understand the messages of the others as thoroughly and completely as possible and express themselves in a way that makes it easy for the others to understand them → *encompassing understanding*;
- Tend to collaborate or “compete” in a friendly, playful fashion rather than feed destructive rivalry, distortion, or ignorance in their relationship → *cooperative attitude*;
- Dynamically balance their need for autonomy as well as relatedness and coherence with the project goals → *relatedness and coherence as well as autonomy*;
- Are mindfully aware of their own need to actualize themselves as well as the tendency of the relationship to form as a larger, more complex, dynamically ordered whole, the bond it creates, the influence it exerts on the partners and teammates, and the effects it receives and passes on through interacting with the environment → *organism as part of a larger whole, interdependence*;
- Appreciate that conflicting goals, directions, and opinions tend to create tension. If they manage to deal with problems cooperatively, that may even strengthen their relationship or lead to some transformation that helps both/all relationship partners to move forward → *acknowledgment of and dealing with tension*;
- Reduce negative stress and transform it into creative tension. This can happen by realizing autonomy and self-acceptance concurrently with respecting the others and the environment → *stress reduction and respect*;
- Promote the unfolding of the other as well as self and the relationship. This can happen by including the others and aiming to provide space and opportunities for them to be present, contributing, and facilitative or cooperative in their own ways. This will allow relationship partners to feel more accepted (by others and self) and to express acceptance → *inclusion/participation with acceptance*.

Viewed from a systemic perspective, the encompassing social environment interactively contributes to and benefits from the team. We tend to refer to the respective relationships as “*co-actualizing*” as an expression of the self-organizing principle in humans who actualize themselves *and* the whole team or relationship system through their constructive interaction (Motschnig-Pitrik and Barrett-Lennard 2010).

Whereas further research on the tendency toward co-actualization is urgently needed, there is an equally pressing need to “apply” the early findings in the practice of living and working together. So what does this mean in the practice of teamwork? Here are some incentives.

14.2.1 Genuine Interaction, Relatedness, and a High Degree of Autonomy Versus Imposing, Controlling, and Manipulating

As Rogers wrote in his famous article with Farson on active listening in *Communicating in Business Today* (1987), we tend not to want to be changed or manipulated by others, forced to defend our self-image. Each attempt at imposing something on us, be it meeting a deadline, documenting code, and speaking a particular language, will be met with initial resistance. The more push one person exerts on the other and the more control s/he takes over the other, the less that person's actualizing tendency will be able to unfold and the less both/all will be able to co-actualize.

Thus, if the situation allows both or all team members to genuinely share their feelings, meanings, and views, each can be a part of the solution (Ryback 1998). However, if partners differ significantly, considerable effort may be needed to reach consensus and tension would surface along the way. Therefore, advanced empathizing and moderation competencies, as well as personal maturity of all concerned, are needed in order to enable, initiate, and facilitate genuine interaction and to stop it at the right point in time without getting lost in the complexity of the interaction (iCom Team 2014). An example will follow shortly (see Sect. 14.5).

14.2.2 Considering Whether Collaborative Problem Solving and Collaboration Is an Option


When there is a problem, we are inclined to think that someone must have caused it and hence is to be blamed for the negative consequences. While this may hold in the mechanical world of parts, materials, and products, it is highly problematic in the complexity of interpersonal relationship in which cause and effect tend to interweave in complex patterns (Kriz 2013). Frequently, undesirable or annoying behavior of one person is very likely to come as a reaction to some frustrated need or experience. For example, a colleague's "misbehaving" may well be the consequence of this person's not receiving proper attention or being under-/over-challenged. In such cases, a shift in the perspective in which we look at problems may be helpful for all involved. Instead of labeling the colleague as "problematic" or asking who is the "bad guy," we could realize that "we have a problem" and see how we can join efforts to resolve it. Aiming for transformative communication and, in particular, co-actualization in that case would mean that "if I am to facilitate the personal growth of others in relation to me, then I must grow, and while this is often painful it is also enriching" (Rogers 1961, p. 51).

Summarizing, the process of transforming communication in a team can be significantly facilitated or hindered by external factors such those listed in Table 14.1.

Table 14.1 External factors supporting or hindering transformative communication and teamwork

Supportive	Hindering
Executive support	Top management is in opposition to the idea or project
Engagement in a shared goal	Following separate or antagonistic goals
Accounting for flexibility and managing change	Restrictive regulations forbidding or strongly restricting flexibility
Social sharing acknowledged as a “part of the deal”	Strict task orientation with no time for social sharing
Information flows naturally as appropriate	Information is hidden, distorted, or gets stuck
Devotion of adequate time to prepare when a decision is due	Lack of time making it impossible to prepare thoughtfully
Collaboration and friendly competition	Rivalry and tough competition
Adequate skills and/or competencies for the challenge at hand	Missing skills and/or competencies for the challenge at hand

Unfavorable contexts tend to impose heavy burdens on relationships, teams, and their leaders. Such circumstances need to be recognized to “free the path” for well-functioning teams and co-actualizing processes. If this seems not to be realistically possible, the question remains whether to engage in that context at all, or even to consciously give up on the particular context, or to try to change (or flee or fight) the circumstances. Part II of this book provides a variety of case examples how people in leadership positions put the people-oriented agenda to work and what consequences accrued for them and their teams or workgroups.

 Invitation to reflect and complement Table 14.1:

Can you list other factors supporting or hindering transformative communication and teamwork based on your experience?

Can you distill yet further factors from the case examples given in Part II of this book?

14.3 Job Interviews

Undoubtedly, the most precious and constituting resource of any team is its members. Hence, getting the right people to work together is a crucially important task and is far too often underestimated in the rush of everyday obligations. Let me share my recent story in this context: I (Renate) was fortunate to win a large EU-wide project in which the University of Vienna was the lead partner. As project

leads, we collaborated with the head of the postgraduate center of the University of Vienna who, by the way, also happens to be a systemic coach. I was amazed by the way we arranged the hiring process for new teammates who were supposed to collaborate with the already existing core-team. It felt exactly right to me and was what I'd call a prototypical example of transformative communication. My whole experience during the hiring process was so clearly positive and united that I feel an urge to share the process for potential reuse. Its structured parts are presented as Resource Box 14.1, and some annotations follow.

Resource Box 14.1: Transformative communication in job interviews

Preparation phase

Collaborate and co-think in putting together the job announcement. Share your proposal with colleagues who will interface with the new person and consider their inputs

Share the candidates' applications with those who are interested. If several people have applied, take the time to sort the applications regarding quality from your perspective, not to demand too much of your colleagues' time

Agree whom to invite in a first round and propose time and location for the interviews. Plan sufficient time (e.g., one hour between interviews) so that you can reflect upon each candidate right after the interview

During the interview

Meet the candidate at eye level of authenticity

Share relevant information transparently

Let the candidates ask questions about what they want to know

Listen actively and show your genuine interest in the candidate

Ask the relevant questions that are on your mind while always respecting the candidates' private sphere. Sometimes, it is helpful to prepare some questions based on the candidate's application or CV if something impressed or struck you in particular. As well, address the financial aspects, whether they are negotiable or fixed

At the end, you may want to ask the candidates how they felt about the interview and whether their interest in the job was still the same as before. Let the candidates know about the next steps from your perspective. If you feel thankful for the candidate's effort to come to the interview, you may want to share this feeling

Reflection

Leave some amount of time between the interviews to "digest" your impression and clear your mind before the next person comes

If you get the chance to reflect upon the interview with colleagues, take that opportunity. Voicing impressions and sharing feelings with trusted colleagues may be worth a lot in the complex situation of hiring future colleagues. We all

come with mental models that contain mind shadings that we are hardly aware of and an open sharing with colleagues can compensate for our “blind spots” or biases

14.4 Case Example: The Hiring Process for Team Members for an EU Project

14.4.1 Job Announcement

The initiators of the project (3 dedicated people) sat together to share ideas and consult about an appropriate text for 3 job announcements. Each of us would primarily interface with one of the positions to be filled, but eventually, we all would form a team. This is why, from the beginning, we consulted each other regarding the respective job descriptions. Each of us contributed to the content as well as to a concise, understandable, and attractive wording of the job ad. What did each of us really expect from the candidate? What kind of previous experience would be most helpful? Which qualification would be indispensable? What could we offer? How would we describe the project and its/our vision?

We produced the first version of the job ad during the meeting and made it accessible to all three of us to edit it before publicizing the announcement. In fact, some of us revised the text slightly and, fortunately, we were all in favor of the minor changes, perhaps because we had a shared vision of the project and knew and accepted each other’s interests. The job announcements got done in time and were published together.

14.4.2 Preparation for Job Interviews

The applications were presorted by a secretary, and each of the three project initiators got the applications for the three positions to look at them and suggest with whom they would like to talk in person. We agreed that, time permitting, all three of us would participate in the interviews. In the case of time constraints, at least the person who would primarily interface with the candidate would need to be present, and in case of doubt, there would be a second interview. This seemed reasonable and time-efficient to all, still utilizing as many of the core-team’s perceptions as possible, without the stress to have to be present at each interview. Before actually inviting the candidates, we conversed by phone and mail to share our preferences and consult whom actually to invite in the first round. For me, these consultations were really helpful since they opened my eyes to issues I had not attended to at first sight but that were definitely relevant: Would that person be able to use computerized tools and social media fluently to allow for cross-border collaboration despite her advanced age?

14.4.3 Job Interviews

First of all, we went into the interviews with the attitude that we need a bright colleague for our team and thus were thankful to the applicants to respond to our call and take the time to come for the interview. This allowed us to meet the candidates at eye level, since they, too, needed something from us, namely the job. So no one party basically was in a position of power and the conversation was carried on with a high level of respect and sensitivity and, interestingly, also openness, once candidates started to feel safe in our environment.

We dynamically assigned one of us to lead the interview and introduce the candidate to our institution, the other participants, and the project at hand. Often, the first question to the candidates was how he or she found the announcement and what made them apply. No part of the interview was made up or designed in advance; rather, the conversation followed a natural flow of questions and answers. The questions asked most frequently showed a genuine interest in the candidate and his or her potential fit to the vacant position. Examples of such questions were as follows: What brings you here? What is it that you resonated to in the announcement? Is there anything in the announcement that you wish to understand better or that you are not sure you can handle properly? If so, what is it and what questions or doubts do you have along those lines?

Further frequent questions addressed the candidate's previous occupation. We were interested what the candidates liked and did not like in their previous job, what makes them want to change, and why they thought they would be the person to fill the vacant position. To each response, the interviewing team gave their responses in turn in order to reveal as much from the job profile and actual tasks to be accomplished as possible and allow the candidate to react.


Yet further questions probed into the candidates' plans for the future: Where they were heading to in their career? Whether they would be available for the position for the whole project period? And when they could start? Finally, we made clear that we had just very little space to adjust salaries because they were regulated by the project's grant. Nevertheless, we were interested what candidates had expected to earn and thus asked them. Based on their response and our impression from how the interview went so far, we tried to negotiate the expectations with some options and benefits we could offer. At the very end, we asked whether the candidate had further questions and said good-bye and when, approximately, the candidates would hear back from us. We also asked them kindly to let us know in case they were no longer interested.

14.4.4 Reflection

After each interview that lasted about 30 min, we took at least 20 min to share our impressions on how the interview went, how we liked the candidate, and how well

they would fit with us, respectively, with the candidates already preselected. The reflection helped to open up new perspectives and to compare our often similar but at times also diverging perceptions and interpretations. I feel I learned a lot in particular through these reflections and could understand, for example, why my colleague valued the previous job experience of one of the colleagues so highly and that it indeed could be a particular bonus for administering our project.

In no case did I feel it necessary to trick out a candidate with a question or apply any technique to reveal something that they would prefer to hide. Intriguingly, some candidates were quite open regarding some criteria they did not fully meet. For example, a young lady with excellent language skills in three European languages admitted that her English was not quite so good but that she would definitely be willing to work at improving it. The thoughtful openness of some candidates made them appear honest, present, and sympathetic. It had the effect that the interviewing team reconsidered the importance of part of the job criteria and weighed the candidate's presented profile against what we thought would be most needed in their job and in our team.

 Invitation to reflect:

What effect do you think did the collaborative job interviews have on the core-team (i.e., the project initiators)?

How, as a candidate, would you feel at a job interview in which three to four persons take part actively?

Do you think that the interview procedure described above is effective and efficient in finding the best candidate? Can you think of any improvement?

Retrospectively, the collaborative hiring process had the following effects:

- Deepening of project vision;
- Getting to know each other and learning about priorities, particular interests, skills, and oneself, leading to an increased transparency;
- Growing as a team and learning from each other;
- Clear responsibilities in the interview with an option but no urge to participate;
- Interviewees are dealt with at eye level, not as someone who wants something from us. Everybody is respected for who s/he is;
- New employees get the impression that they are accepted into a well-functioning team and, from the first moment, are inspired by the transformative communication that they can join in naturally.

14.5 Decision-Making in and with a Team—The Role of Transformative Communication

Decision-making is a crucial activity faced by every leader, manager, and in fact by every person on a daily basis. It means to choose which potentials to realize and which to discard and thus how to move on in the present and future. Because of the vital importance of decision-making for all areas of our life and even planet, innumerable research studies have been and are still being performed and published (for a very readable summary on the theme consult, e.g., Johnson and Johnson 1975/2006). This is why this section emphasizes on the dynamics of transformative communication in group decision-making. Moreover, focusing on experiential learning, we provide a few illustrative case examples in the first place and subsequently accompany readers in their making sense and deriving insight from the examples through reflection.

The assumption that communication plays a decisive role in the quality of a group's or team's decisions is confirmed, for example, by Johnson and Johnson (1975/2006, p. 291), who wrote that factors enhancing group decision-making include, among others, positive interdependence, face-to-face promotive interaction, and social skills. Another significant finding from research concerns the benefits of involving the group in decision-making. According to Johnson and Johnson (1975/2006), who draw on a rich base of original studies by Kurt Lewin, his group, and others, the following benefits accrue when involving group members in decisions concerning the group/team.

First, the quality of a decision can be enhanced by utilizing the resources of each member. In particular, members responsible for implementing the decision should be most knowledgeable about what the decision should be and that knowledge is best released through being involved in making the decision. In this respect, being able to voice information transparently, and in a way that others understand it, is an enormous benefit that transformative communication can contribute.

Second, and no less important, the members' commitment to implement the decision increases when being part of the process leading to a decision. The members' allegiance to the group/team tends to increase significantly when being involved in decision-making and so do their outcomes. This is not surprising since, in our terms, inclusion and involvement are expressions of respect, one of the core conditions of a promotive climate. Moreover, being able to co-determine the direction of the team rather than being imposed from the outside is more in line with each person's actualizing process and thus his or her intrinsic motivation, a most powerful source of motivational energy.

Another argument in favor of involving a team in making decisions is that, in groups, incorrect solutions are more likely to be recognized and rejected (Johnson and Johnson 1975/2006, p. 271). This is because the transactive memory of a group or team exceeds that of an individual member. Thereby, the *transactive memory* "is the knowledge of each individual member and the ways to exchange it through communication" (Wegner 1995), cited in (Johnson and Johnson 1975/2006,

p. 272). However, group discussion should last long enough to get beyond what everyone already knows (Larson et al. 1998).

So, generally, there exist good reasons for utilizing a team's resources for making important decisions rather than having one person make the decision. This does not mean, however, that collaborative decision-making is always effective or easy and smooth. This brings up another question: Can transformative communication also help to reduce some of the obstacles of effective decision-making in groups?

In our experience that is confirmed by the case examples in Part II, it can help to overcome some of the hindrances and creatively transform others. For example, if the composition of the group is unfavorable with too widely dispersed interests of members, insufficient knowledge or skills in relevant fields, or too little time available, transformative communication would reach its limits. With such massive hindrances standing in the way, it cannot directly unfold its full potential to contribute to high-quality decisions. It can, however, let the group experience and realize the problem at hand quickly and help transform the whole situation, potentially leading to a different constellation or a totally different course of action. In brief, under adverse circumstances, transformative communication would not directly contribute to an optimal decision by a given team but would help members and leaders to recognize that the constellation is inappropriate and ring the bell for a creative solution that would step out of the given frame and reframe the problem or setting. For example, if a team realizes that it does not have time for collaborative decision-making but nevertheless trusts its leader, the members might just share their views and delegate the decision to the leader or one or two knowledgeable persons whom they trust to find the optimum under the given circumstances.


After this brief theoretical reasoning, let us turn to real-life situations.

Case example *Including the group in a decision may not be enough!*

During a further education program for counselors, a 3-h workshop on the application of "focusing" for dealing with difficult situations was offered (Gendlin 1978). About 30 people attended the workshop that started with a brief introduction of the facilitator and the theme, a quick round on participants' reasons for attending the workshop, and a brief focusing exercise that was reflected in the plenum. For the remaining two hours, the facilitator gave us, the participants, the choice, whether we wanted to go into the theory in detail, or rather would prefer to practice and reflect upon focusing in the group. She made clear at the outset that a mix would not be possible since each part needed the whole time to be covered meaningfully. She asked those around to voice their preferences. Intriguingly, participants turned out to be distributed almost exactly half-half, with each camp having perfect arguments why either theory or practice would be preferable. Clearly, the group was split into two camps. Then, the facilitator tried to negotiate some solution, but it seemed that half of the group would be dissatisfied and somehow even feel cheated for not getting what they wanted. Interestingly, then, the facilitator

shared that this was indeed a difficult situation. Then, she took the space to illustrate the application of her focusing technique in the situation at hand, hoping to find a solution while verbalizing her thoughts and feelings. However, in the already strained situation—none were actually getting what they wanted—the criticism became even louder. “This seems like manipulation! You’re trying to put something into our mouths that you want but that we didn’t ask for!”

The facilitator became somewhat defensive and admitted that the technique would help her in finding her personal solution strategy in the given context, but of course would not help to unite the split group. This openness resulted in participants’ becoming more accepting of the difficult group situation. At the same time, the participants’ genuine interest in the (theoretical) constraints and (practical) opportunities of the technique arose and an interesting dialogue evolved around the steps that the facilitator had taken in her search of a solution and the theoretical grounding for these steps. So voices of each camp paved the way for themselves to nurture their interests. Above all, however, we participants learned experientially and significantly about the sophistication of group decision-making: Including the group with best intentions may not be enough! Or may it have been enough?

 Invitation to reflect:


What, in your view, was the problem in the case example above?
 How would you have gone about the whole process, in retrospect?
 What insight are you taking with you from the case example?
 Do you agree that, in sum, the group directed the process of “delivering” to participants the best mix of learning possible in the given situation?
 Do you feel you would like to have been a participant in that group or are you happy you didn’t have to go through that strained situation?

Case example *When to schedule follow-up meetings?*

A project team of 10 people met regularly face-to-face every two weeks for their *jour fixe* that lasted about 2 h. The major services were delivered to the customer as planned. For the last project month, the schedule was such that one little service was due to be installed in about two weeks’ time and a brief project reflection and closing session should take place at the end of the month. The team leader was not sure whether a short *jour fixe* before the delivery of the last service was necessary or whether the service delivery could proceed without a prior meeting and, just in case of complications, could be revised in the very final meeting along with the project reflection. She thought: Should we just continue the routine of *jour fixes* or would

members appreciate to spend more time with installing the service at the customer's site and talking to them and then bring everything into the final reflection meeting? Why not ask the team? But: What to do if they have different opinions regarding the solution? Wouldn't the decision take too long and waste participants' time?

The team leader was really curious what team members would prefer and, as there were still 15 min left in the jour fixe, she decided to check with the team, but not let this become an endless discussion. She started voicing the question, clearly presenting the two alternatives, and letting the team know that, in case we do not find a decision quickly, she would make one, based on the team members' voices and her own preference. Astonishingly, all team members expressed their preference in having just one final, but potentially longer, jour fixe. For many of them, this would help to transfer valuable time to spend with the customer. The team leader ended the jour fixe with the words: "This was a very smooth process and clear sign of what you prefer. I had thought we might play it safe and meet in two weeks, but I'm happy with your decision." All went well and the "final" reflection session became one in which even a follow-up of the project was considered. All were fully present!

 Invitation to reflect:

Do you think/feel it was a good idea to include the team? Why do you think so?

Why, in your view, was the decision-making in the above case example successful?

How would you have gone about the whole process?

What insight are you taking with you from the case example?

Do you feel you would like to have been a member in that team?

Do you think that, as a team member, you can contribute to effective team decision-making? What are your potentials as a member and which limitations do you encounter?

Case example *Decide, whether to buy or build software*

Context: An international project team of 18 people from 7 partners is having its 3rd consortium meeting. It is becoming increasingly evident that some training software that is needed for an important project component cannot be reused as is, as was assumed in the project specification.

Coordinator: "You know that by now it is pretty clear that the software we wanted to integrate into our portal isn't available in the languages we need. A translation and system-adaptation would cost about 20,000 EUR and we can't rely on it to serve all our needs reliably and be finished in time so that

integration testing can start as scheduled. I know that nobody had expected this complication and three partners already negotiated intensively with the company owning of the software. They will tell you more, if you want. I wish to thank you, Kate, Suzan, and Tony for all your effort to find out what we know now about that software!

My sense is that we need to come to a resolution during this meeting such that partners can move on. And we have more on our agenda for today, so let me suggest the following:

In my view, there are three options:

- Buy from owner,
- build our own, or
- apply for a change of the project specification.

As the last option comes with a high risk of rejection of the whole project by the commission, I am strongly suggesting refraining from that option. Any of the other two options will require a shift in all or some of the partners' budgets, because even if we don't buy the software, one of the partners will need resources to produce it. We should discuss that now. So let's see what each of you thinks and then go for lunch together. Hopefully we find a consensus by 3 p.m. today, because then we need to move to other issues that are at least as important as this one. (*Participants nod their heads.*) If we don't find a solution by this evening, I will make a decision based on my assessment of the situation. Is that o.k. or do you have another suggestion?" ... [As there are no other suggestions, partners start sharing their views.]

☞ Invitation to reflect:

How does the decision-making effort on “buy or build” resonate with you? Do you consider the above an example of effective communication? Why? Is there anything you object to? How would you have acted in the same situation?

How do you feel about the coordinator?

Summarizing, Resource Box 14.2 offers some inputs and considerations that the authors find helpful in transformative decision-making. While the first four points are derived from Johnson and Johnson (1975/2006), the others originate from the authors' experience.

Resource Box 14.2: Some resources regarding transformative decision-making in/with teams are as follows:

What leaders and team members might want to know about decision-making in teams

- Involvement in decision-making increases members' commitment to implement the decision and facilitates the steps, activities, and adaptations needed to implement the decision (Johnson and Johnson 1975/2006, p. 273). This can be understood such that personal interests and directions are considered and aligned from the outset rather than unaligned regulations being imposed from the outside, often via formal authority and with little or no connection to the people concerned
- The more the persons involved in the decision-making, the longer it will tend to take to reach a decision
 - If the time needed for both making and implementing a decision is considered, however, the time factor becomes less clear. Often, the extra time taken to arrive at a consensual decision will greatly reduce the time needed to implement it (Johnson and Johnson 1975/2006, p. 290)
- In groups, incorrect solutions are more likely to be recognized and rejected (Johnson and Johnson 1975/2006, p. 271)
- On a meta-communication level, share your perceptions and given constraints regarding the decision process. Provide all useful information needed to make an informed decision. Be transparent regarding the process, time available, and your experience. On a meta-level, you may want to share your genuine hopes and doubts. Share why we need a decision and when we need it
- Sometimes, inviting participants to position themselves in a room along an axis with two extremes (such as buy a commercial tool versus adapt open source software) may help to reveal the team's current attitude toward an issue. Members can be asked to share why they stand at their chosen position. This increases transparency and brings dynamics more clearly into a session
- Use of social media. While face-to-face meetings tend to promote creativity and allow for rich social interaction, it may not always appropriate to call such a meeting. Social media, if utilized thoughtfully, can help to keep members connected and informed between regular sessions
- Tools such as skype or Skype for Business™ (a registered trademark of Microsoft) or mobile apps offer, for example, surveys that make it easy to share one's preference and see the team's position. This, for example, can help to orient oneself without consuming too much of the team's time

After having had a chance to witness—though only in a recorded, textual version that lacks several social clues—a few situations that challenged a team and their leader or manager, let us try to distill potential expressions of the items of the people-oriented agenda in those and similar situations. Before reading on, readers may want to produce their own resource box on these expressions and then compare their list with the exemplary features proposed by us authors in Resource Box 14.3.

Resource Box 14.3: Putting the people-oriented agenda to work in/with teams

Contact

The team leader and team members make themselves available to each other whenever appropriate

Frequent contact will facilitate the team's alignment and coherent direction

Collocation can significantly improve contact

Online communication can support contact but—due to the reduced social channel—cannot fully substitute face-to-face meetings

A proper blend between virtual and face-to-face meeting has the potential to combine the benefits and overcome the disadvantages of the two modes of communication (Motschnig-Pitrik and Nykl 2014)

Transparency of goals, vision, and participants

The objectives, preferences, constraints, and interests are transparent; optimally, there is no hidden agenda

Members (including the leader) express themselves as openly as appropriate, yet with respect

Instead of blaming, members make an effort to learn from mistakes and make sure not to repeat them

Members can sense their resonance or dissonance and express themselves clearly

Whenever appropriate, feelings, be they positive, negative, or ambiguous, are expressed and attended to in order to increase transparency and improve understanding

Respect for each other, oneself, and the environment

Members feel included in all aspects and decisions regarding the team. This does not necessarily mean that every member participates in every decision process; it does, however, mean that as few as possible issues are imposed on team members without giving them a chance to be heard

Members experience that their presence, attention, participation, and honesty are appreciated

Members' time resources and schedules are respected as far as possible

Making oneself accessible to others while also staying true to one's own needs and interests

Speaking a language that the others understand is most essential

Trying to understand and to be understood comprehensively and thoroughly

Making explicit effort to really hear others to understand them from their context and perspective

Sensing where the team is as a whole. For example, how do others engage or not engage while I'm in conversation with another person? Does it make sense to include others too?

Sensing the situation at hand. What are we up to? Can the path we're following right now lead to a solution or are we heading toward a dead end and wasting our time?

Online: Responding to mails comprehensively, attending to all important issues at least briefly


Collaboration and sharing

Problems that are shared sooner can start being resolved collaboratively sooner

Sharing should not be constrained to task-related issues only, some social sharing proves to support team cohesion and satisfaction, and people can be whole and connect on more channels than the often tight task dimension (Johnson and Johnson 1975/2006; Böhm et al. 2013, 2014; Motschnig-Pitrik and Nykl 2014)

14.6 Conclusion

This chapter brought up several examples of situations that we encountered in teams, emphasizing the processes of selecting and interviewing future team members and team decision-making. Drawing on the literature and our own research and experience, we suggested essential characteristics of well-functioning teams and the co-actualizing processes that tend to flow in such teams.

 Invitation to reflect:

Peter Schmid (2005, p. 15–16) said that the therapist is nothing less than challenged to risk building—together with the client—a unique relationship through *co-experiencing, co-reflecting, co-constructing of alternatives, and hence “co-responding”* to the existential situation. Do you think the same holds true for the team leader or manager? Does it equally hold true for each person collaborating in a team and wanting to promote transformative communication?

We hope that some of our resources and case examples will prove useful for you as you navigate and reflect your own path through the exciting and challenging landscape of teamwork and team leadership.

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