7 Team Dynamics That Slow Progress

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We all want the same thing. A team that collaborates well, enjoys working together and holds each other accountable to achieving business results. Who doesn't want to hit goals, have fun and earn more? Unfortunately, there are common pitfalls that hold us back from reaching that ideal.

1 Leaders stop challenging each other.

Conflict can get messy, loud and frustrating, but **you should really worry when you don't see it at all.** When ideas go unchallenged because the team feels silenced, decision making gets stagnant. After a presentation have you ever looked over at a colleague expecting them to bring in a different point of view only for them to say nothing? You can see in their body language they don't agree with the presenter, but they make no move to speak up. If you could get into their head you might hear self-talk that sounds something like, *"He's just not worth challenging because he won't change his mind."*

2 No one feels heard.

Individuals may be more focused on what's wrong and less focused on keeping relationships healthy. They don't listen well, and often care more about winning a disagreement than addressing the issue at hand. They push too hard, across too many things. They appear to their peers as if they can't listen and validate other points of view, and in some cases it comes across as if they don't even care about what others are saying.

3 False accountability runs rampant.

Exceptional teams hold each other accountable – they know **Who**, **What** and **When**: *who* is going to take action, *what* they are going to do, and *when* it will be completed. Then they work to ensure that everyone sticks to that plan. Some teams struggle with defining action steps. Others fail in the execution. They are adept at defining the 3 Ws, but when deadlines are missed, there are no consequences. When *"I didn't get the report done today"* is met with *"no problem, get it to me when you can,"* the team may feel like they are being empathetic, but they are tolerating a lack of accountability. A better response would have been, *"We agreed to get that report done today. What can you juggle to make that happen?"*

(4) Breaking social contracts is routine.

Every company has a social contract that dictates the norms of how people work together. It is an agreement on how we are going to treat each other, especially during conflict. Some are written down, trained and formalized, while others are built over time without intentionality. Healthy teams are purposeful about defining their social contracts and holding each other accountable to living by them.

(5) It's easy to find displays of discomfort with change.

When the team accepts the status quo, invoking *"this is what's worked before,"* the organization becomes stagnant. People stop bringing in new ideas because they feel there is little desire for transformation to occur. Low need for change people can miss better ways to do things.

(6) Homogenous teams lack diverse ideas.

Frequently, we seek to build a team of people who are like each other. More to the point, we pick people just like us. We believe that kind of team will be more collaborative, experience less conflict and get more done. In reality, we're stunting growth and limiting our potential results by making the team too homogenous.

(7) A psychologically unsafe environment is fostered.

Psychological safety is the ability to make a mistake and not worry about it. You can say something uncertain, such as, *"Hey, this just may be a dumb idea, but..."* You can ask for help, *"Hey, you know what guys, this is really kicking my tail. I need some help on this."*

Ultimately, psychological safety is the ability to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is required to optimize team performance. If people don't feel safe, they will exert too much energy protecting themselves and not enough energy collaborating.

I bet you recognize some of these behaviors in your own organization. If you do, know there are proven ways to overcome the challenges.

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