

Nurturing relationships: the integrated Triad

In business settings people sometimes question the importance of getting along and the need for strong friendships. They punt the task is imperative angle. The reality is that tasks are delivered by people, so if we want to perform, we need to be both task AND relational orientated. Gallup found after 25 years of extensive engagement studies, that close relationships are indeed central. The workplace



holds a unique position for most employees in a society widely regarded as having lost much of the social contact of prior generations. The average number of people in a [person's network has declined](#) between 1984-2009, from 3 to 1.5 persons. The number saying there is no one whom they discuss important matters with has nearly tripled!! For many solitary souls, work is increasingly filling the gap left by a socially bankrupt life. With the enforced move to remote working/social distancing due to the pandemic, strong work relationships could well become paramount whilst simultaneously being more threatened.

The issue is not whether office friendships replace our private life connections, but to what degree a certain level of close affiliation creates beneficial effects for the business. Many [studies](#) have shown that social connections with co-workers are a strong predictor, some would say the biggest predictor, of job satisfaction. People with friends at work are happier at work. The more interconnected a group, the better they will perform both routinely and when under pressure.

[Research](#) on workers in various settings have shown that friends are more likely to invite and share candid information, suggestions and opinions, and to accept feedback without feeling threatened. Friends tolerate disagreements better than those who are not friends. Group members who more closely identify with the team are more likely to monitor its performance against a goal. Intuitively it makes sense, you have more vested in the relationship, and therefore want it to succeed. It is ironic that management indabas occur where people play golf, bond, socialize and then question the importance of the need to address friendships in a survey. Insightful managers recognise that people want to build meaningful friendships and company loyalty is built on such relationships.

Ask any group of people what the key ingredients in a healthy relationship and communication and trust are come up, every time. Despite this ubiquitous wisdom, the dismal

[divorce](#) rates (doubled across the world in the last 4 decades) and company blow-outs indicates that we are not so strong at implementation. So, what is going on? Maybe we need to first look more closely at the context within which relationships exist, then apply sound communication and trust principles (these make up the integrated triad of healthy relationships). In doing so we understand the dynamics at play and how to proceed successfully.

RELATIONSHIP CONTEXT

In relationships there are inherent power dynamics at play, and whilst we believe in the value of authenticity, there are [inescapable differences](#) that determine our success depending on the context. There are three consistent challenges I often come across in my consulting work, they are: 1) How do you influence upwards to get things done that are outside your span of control? 2) How do you interact at your peer level to maximise the team's synergies? 3) How do you manage relationships with your staff so that they are both empowered and accountable? It is not to say that the insights below are not transferable across contexts, just that they become more crucial depending on which audience we are talking to. So, let us explore how we approach relationships on 3 levels: our bosses, peers and sub-ordinates.

Influencing upwards

For organizations to prosper, managers must feel empowered to identify and promote the need for change. Middle level managers especially gather valuable intelligence from direct contact with customers, suppliers, and colleagues; they can often see when the market is ripe for a certain offering, for instance, or spot signs that a partnership will not work. But for many reasons, ranging from a fear of negative consequences to compliance with a top-down culture, they may not voice their ideas and concerns. Even when they do, they often struggle to persuade the people at the top. Prof. Susan Ashford (University of Michigan Ross Business School) and Prof. James Detert (University of Virginia Darden Business School) studied "issue selling" in a range of organizations, roles, and industries. They identified seven tactics associated with success. Based on their [research](#) managers should:

- (1) tailor their pitch to the goals, values, and knowledge of decision makers;
- (2) frame the issue to show how it supports a strategic goal;
- (3) manage emotions (their own and their audience's);
- (4) get the timing right by, say, attending to a boss's preoccupations or watching larger trends;
- (5) involve others, both in and outside of their networks;
- (6) adhere to organizational norms, such as how leaders prefer to receive information; and

(7) suggest solutions, or at least propose ways to find one. Issue selling is an ongoing process that requires groundwork and patience.

Midlevel managers who do the above effectively get decision makers' attention and make a real difference in their organizations. In fact, those that combined all seven strategies accounted for 40% of the difference between successes and failures in terms of buy-in. Be honest, look at your last failed pitch, which if any of these tactics did you apply well?

Interactions at a team level

Crickets, crickets, crickets.... not the World Cup 2019 kind, but rather the thunderous sound of silence in meetings when people's ideas, concerns or opinions are asked for and nothing/little is offered. Then, as people congregate around the water-cooler or on the smoking deck the "real conversations" begin. This is when you know you do not have psychological safety in your team!! Some would argue that people must just get braver and find their voice. But here in lies the rub...for genuine candour that is also rooted in maintaining a healthy working relationship, psychological safety becomes THE fundamental precursor.



In interacting with peers, Prof. Amy Edmondson's (Harvard Business School) work on psychological safety has been identified as the [most important characteristic of high-performing](#), inter-dependent teams. Psychological safety is a team climate in which people are comfortable expressing and being themselves. *They are not hindered by inter-personal fear.* They will share with their team half-formed ideas, questions, concerns, mistakes without fear of retribution or embarrassment, humiliation or being ignored.

Psychological safety is NOT: between just two people, it's a team dynamic; being "nice"; a personality attribute; immunity from consequences; a 100% guarantee of effectiveness, but it does make it easier to find out what people have to offer.

Like positive psychology, the concept psychological safety can conjure up false assumptions and cynicism. Naming this construct team interpersonal maturity or interpersonal health may have been better suited to the corporate context.

In a knowledge economy, where we place a premium on finding the best talent, we need to ensure we create psychological safety. Employees should be able to bring all their insights to the table, without fear of recrimination and the need for constant self-monitoring to avoid the woolly mammoths sitting in the room. In turn, this will allow us to deal with the real issues, in real

time and become more responsive, innovative and true learning organisations. Only those who want to perpetuate power imbalances, or whom have fragile self-esteem, and/or low self-awareness will struggle to appreciate the power of psychological safety, an idea whose time has come!

I have developed a psychological safety framework that enables this crucial quality in teams, it includes the following dimensions:



Initially you will have to build ground level awareness and support, in teams. From there based on data that you can acquire from our psychological safety surveys (team and individual 360-degree) you can start making targeted interventions with the intact teams, based on their needs. Ultimately you need to ritualise it into the team's way of operating for it to really stick.

Managing our people

Your direct manager has a disproportionate impact on discretionary effort levels (engagement) of team members, to the tune of [70% of the variance](#). Research by Liz Wiseman (author of Multipliers) is hugely instructive in building engagement. If you have been in business as long as I have, you probably have experienced two dramatically different types of leaders. The first type, Diminishers, drains intelligence, energy, and capability from the people around them and always needs to be the smartest person in the room. The second type, Multipliers,

are the leaders who use their intelligence to amplify the smarts and capabilities of the people around them. When these leaders walk into a room, light bulbs go off over people's heads; ideas flow and problems get solved. Do you make those around you smarter?

Think of your best and worst experiences of being led. What did these people do differently in terms of: what they believed about you; how they behaved towards you? What percentage of your capability/intelligence (not how much effort you put in) did they get from you as results of their leadership style? Typically, when I ask this question in sessions people will indicate in the 20-40% range for diminisher leaders, and 100-150% range for multiplier leaders. That is a massive difference in discretionary effort, and when you think of how we are expected to do more with less it becomes business critical to lead like a multiplier. These numbers are borne out by Liz Wisemans own research as well.

THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT

How the best leaders make everyone smarter

GET MORE DONE WITH FEWER RESOURCES, DEVELOP TALENT, AND CULTIVATE NEW IDEAS TO DRIVE CHANGE AND INNOVATION

We've all experienced two different types of leaders. The first type drains intelligence, energy, and capability from the people around them and needs to be the smartest person. These leaders are called diminishers. On the other side are leaders who use their intelligence to amplify the smarts and capabilities of the people around them. These leaders are called Multipliers. We need more of them, especially now leaders are expected to do more with less. Are you a genius or a genius maker?

LEADERSHIP GAPS **THE MULTIPLIER CONCEPT** **AN ROI OF 163%...**

Bersin's report reveals the following leadership gaps:

- 86% strong succession planning
- 87% building global leaders
- 93% building millennial leaders
- 64% value from \$19,840 billion spend

TOP 5 DIMINISHER AND MULTIPLIER MOMENTS
Surveys of ROI Institute Europe revealed.

Top-5 Diminisher Questions - participant	
Question	Discipline
Makes decisions efficiently in a small inner circle	The Decision maker
Micromanages the details	The Micromanager
Takes back responsibility from others as soon as problems arise	The Micromanager
Voices strong opinions and pushes his or her own case	The Tyrant
Lets others people know how much he or she knows	The Know-it-All

Top-5 Multipliers Questions - participant	
Question	Discipline
Generates belief that goals that seem impossible are actually possible	The Challenger
Gives others back up resources to help them be successful	The Investor
Gives others concrete challenges to solve	The Challenger
Gives others the ownership they need to work independently and produce results	The Investor
Gives permission for others to make mistakes	The Liberator

Why Multipliers make everyone smarter and diminishers don't

<p>Diminishers People won't figure it out without me</p> <p>Do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Empire Builder Hoard & underutilize talent Tyrant Create stress that stops thinking Know-It-All Tell people what to do Decision Maker Decide (then debate) Micromanager Manage every detail 	<p>100%</p> <p>100%</p> <p>95%</p> <p>48%</p>	<p>Multipliers People are smart and will figure it out</p> <p>Do</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Talent Magnet Attract and optimize talent Liberator Create space for best thinking Challenger Extend stretch challenges Debate Maker Debate (then decide) Investor Instill ownership & accountability
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ACCIDENTAL DIMINISHERS

Intention and unintended outcomes of accidental diminishers ...

<p>THE IDEA GUY</p> <p>INTENTION? Stimulate ideas in others.</p> <p>UNINTENDED OUTCOME? People shutdown or spend their time chasing the ideas.</p>	<p>THE PACESETTER</p> <p>INTENTION? Draw others into the race.</p> <p>UNINTENDED OUTCOME? Others become spectators.</p>
<p>ALWAYS ON</p> <p>INTENTION? Creating energy, sharing point of view.</p> <p>UNINTENDED OUTCOME? Consuming all of the space for others.</p>	<p>THE RAPID RESPONDER</p> <p>INTENTION? To keep moving fast.</p> <p>UNINTENDED OUTCOME? Others slow down from overload.</p>
<p>THE RESCUER</p> <p>INTENTION? To safeguard employee's reputation.</p> <p>UNINTENDED OUTCOME? People subsequently fail to learn and grow.</p>	<p>THE OPTIMIST</p> <p>INTENTION? Creating a belief the team can do it.</p> <p>UNINTENDED OUTCOME? Disconnection between the leader's and of those doing the work.</p>

The ROI study on the impact of a leadership program revealed an ROI of 163%!

QUESTIONS TO LEADERSHIP DEVELOPERS:

- Enjoying the ride or director of their own success?
- Challenge the program starting with (business) outcomes?
- Leaders of leaders can multiply or diminish, involve them?
- Challenge your leaders to bring their business into the program?
- Peer pressure and accountability raises the quality bar?
- Start with the art and science of questions, what's your most challenging question?

Specifically, multipliers manage five areas: talent, culture, strategy, decision making, and execution, very differently than their less-enlightened colleagues (the diminishers). The table below captures the essence of the differences between these two groups, and a third: the accidental diminisher that many of us fall into. For years I was both the Ideas Guy and Fast Responder and could not see some of the potential downside of this for my team I was leading. I remember one day, one of my most impressive reports came to me in frustration and demanded clarity regarding what I wanted her to do. She was an Actuary and represented SA in Biathlon,

so she was both smart and certainly not averse to hard work. The previous week I had been engulfed in a creative frenzy, looking for competitive advantages to differentiate our organisation and had identified 5 different ideas to explore. That combined with her already extensive workload was plainly unrealistic. She called me out on it and forced me to realise the impact of my behaviour on both her and the team. By thinking and leading like a multiplier, your team will bestow more discretionary effort, more mental and physical energy, and more of the fresh ideas critical for long-term success.

In closing, we need to acknowledge first the relational context we are operating within, and then choose the appropriate approach. This requires a level of insight and flexibility many are not willing to exercise. Peter Drucker, a preeminent thinker in management has the final say regarding an attitude that does however cut across all three levels of interaction...

