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CRACK THE CODE

Toni walked into the conference room, eager to meet with Jim and Brett. On the white board she wrote down the operating principles she planned to review with them.

"You know that a collaborative mind-set is made up of several novel operating principles," she said after they'd arrived and everyone had settled in for their meeting.

Jim nodded while Brett sat quietly, taking in Toni's words.

"What you may not realize," she continued, "is how they support the shift from an authoritarian leadership style to a collaborative leadership style. The former style promotes dependency while the later promotes interdependency. Obviously, this is a far better fit for today's global business world where teams and team-based applications continue to grow"

"Sounds like a real shift in philosophy when you say it that way," Jim said.

"It's definitely a marked departure from traditional thinking and ways of operating. That's why I asked you earlier if we could include Brett in our work together today."

"Appreciate the invite, "Brett said, jumping in. "I agree that it's important to understand the shift so I can support Jim and others as needed in the company."

"Brett, it's good to have you here," Toni said. "As you both know, these principles are adapted from the game of soccer and mirror the team's behaviors and actions on the field. Without them, your team's action and application of tools will be limited."

Which is why you said earlier that it's important to develop the appropriate mind-set *before* you work on acquiring the needed skill set," Jim offered.

"Yes. In fact, developing mind-set before skill set is the key to unlocking the collaboration code," Toni declared emphatically.

Jim nodded. "Exactly."

Walking up to the whiteboard, Toni pointed to what she had written earlier.

TEAM PRINCIPLES

- Focus on Team, Not Position
- Understand That Everyone Can Play
- Embrace Diversity
- Rely on Each Other
- Promote Individual & Team Values
- Seek Out Skillful, Adaptable Players
- Charge the Team to Perform the Work
- Empower Players to Win
- Coach Teams to Respond to Changing Conditions on Their Own
- Develop Partners on the Field
- Achieve Cross-Cultural Agility

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"It's also important to understand that I've listed these operating principles in no particular order," Toni said, "and that they all need to be in play, all the time, in order for your team to effectively collaborate."

Reflecting on what he'd just heard, Jim asked, "What do these principles really mean when applied?"

"Good question, Jim. They help to establish a shared approach to managing the team's actions and behaviors," Toni said.

Jim nodded.

"Jim, say you're leading a team that's working on a project," Toni said. "Your project is one-third complete. Your client proposes a change to the project. While the proposed change has merit, it would expand the project's scope beyond its original parameters. This most likely would delay the project's completion date and exceed budget projections. Keep in mind that you're dealing with a long-term client."

"So, the question for Jim is how to integrate the client's proposed change in the project?' Brett offered.

"Exactly," Toni said. "What say you, Jim?"

"Wow. That's a lot to deal with," Jim said, getting up from his chair and walking across the conference room to stretch his legs—and think. Damn! The last thing he wanted was to embarrass himself in front of Brett. He held his breath and stared at the whiteboard, hoping the right answer would come to him.

"Jim, what do you think your decision will reveal about you, if you're the team leader in this scenario?" Toni finally asked.

Jim sat down. "Perhaps something about the team leader's mind-set."

"Spot-on, Jim," Toni said. "If you've worked on a project with any customer in the past, you'll recognize the phrase 'wouldn't it be great if.' This is a sure sign that the project's scope is going to be challenged. A change introduced now could delay the project and add cost."

"So, Jim's faced with a few choices," Brett said.

"Correct," Toni said. "If we limit his choices either to holding a team meeting to decide how to proceed or to simply telling the client that your team will deliver on the client's request, which option would you choose?"

Jim grabbed his bottle of water and took a sip. "The first choice looks like a more inclusive option. If that's the case, then it's a way to demonstrate a collaborative mind-set, I'm guessing."

"Correct again, Jim," Toni said. She walked back to the whiteboard and wrote out this key principle.

TEAM PRINCIPLE

Coach Teams to Respond to Changing Conditions on Their Own

"As you can see, the first choice promotes this operating principle. However, it may be the riskier option if time is a concern."

"What about the second choice?" Jim asked.

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"Obviously, this choice puts your client first," Toni said, sitting down. "That's not all bad, but it may upset your team. This may place the project's key performance indicators—such as quality, schedule, and budget—at risk."

Jim nodded and leaned back in his chair. "I see what you mean."

Brett was curious. "Toni, are any other principles in play here?"

"Great question, Brett," Toni said. "The answer is yes. In this example, there are other principles in play, but this is the key, or leading, principle used to demonstrate a collaborative mind-set."

"Toni, do you have any other way to help describe each principle when applied?" Jim asked.

"Yes. For each principle in the platform, there's a description," Toni said, leaning over to hand Jim and Brett a one-page document.

"Perfect," Jim said, glancing over at Brett. "This is helpful."

"As you can see," Toni said, "the description of each principle is brief, straightforward, and easy to understand. Again, your challenge is to apply these during your team's work—keeping in mind that, to greater or lesser degrees, they are all in play, or operational, all the time."

TEAM PRINCIPLES

Focus on team, not position. Addresses the need to focus on results that can be produced when all team members effectively interact on the business field.

Understand that everyone can play. Recognizes that technology is the great enabler that allows people everywhere to collaborate.

Embrace diversity. Represents a prerequisite for partnering in global business, serves as a springboard for establishing trust, and brings strength to teams.

Rely on Each Other. Reinforces the team orientation, minimizes the silo mind-set, recognizes interdependency among team members, and supports genuine collaboration.

Promote both individual and team values. Deals with managing both values in a never-ending cycle to help ensure that the process employed to produce team results is working,

Seek out skillful, adaptable players. Promotes the need for flexibility when managing change, requires people and teams who can quickly assimilate and employ new skills and information, and recognizes that multiple skills are needed to perform effectively.

Charge the team to perform the work. Recognizes the self-directed nature of the team charged with accomplishing the task or challenge and recognizes that the team is responsible for its own performance.

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Operating Principles – Continued

Empower players to win. Speaks to the commitment required to develop all team members and to provide continuous feedback with the goal of helping and encouraging them to make better decisions.

Coach teams to respond to changing conditions on their own. Reinforces the need to coach people on teams to manage their own performance in real-time under changing conditions for the purpose of producing positive results.

Develop partners on the field. Recognizes that all players on the business field are to be viewed as leaders and promotes the recognition of every opportunity as a leadership development step.

Achieve cross-cultural agility. Calls for understanding the pivotal nature of relationships—and relationship building/sensitivity—to achieve positive results across cultures.

Toni continued. "It's the combination of all these principles that describes a collaborative mind-set. Without this understanding and application, the principles fail to support team collaboration."

"Is that why you said earlier that people could not switch mind-sets on demand, like flipping a switch?" Brett asked.

"Yes, Brett. That's what makes this both an operational and a developmental challenge. But the good news is that a collaborative mind-set can be learned."

"Does skill set come into play here?" Brett asked.

"For sure," Toni said. "Let's hold that question for now, though, if that's OK. We'll address it soon."

Later that day, Brett rejoined Jim and Toni to pick up their discussion from the morning session. Now that he had a better understanding of how a collaborative mind-set played out, he was looking forward to hearing about the application of a collaborative skill set.

"Brett, you asked earlier about skill set," Toni pointed out.

Brett nodded.

"As we discussed briefly," Toni said, pointing to the whiteboard, "holding a team meeting to decide how to proceed is the first option, and it promotes this principle:

Coach Teams to Respond to Changing Conditions on Their Own

"There are three essential competencies aligned with this principle that come into play to describe skill set," Toni continued.

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THREE ESSENTIAL COMPETENCIES

- Adaptability
- Problem Solving & Decision Making
- Communication

"In our example, the team's purpose for collaborating is to drive creative, real-time problem solving and to entertain the possibility of changing direction," Toni said. "This also requires communication."

Jumping in, Jim said, "I see what you mean."

"The team's ability to be successful is directly related to its commitment to develop these competencies, along with its commitment to use them at work," Toni said.

"What you're saying, Toni," Brett remarked, "is that, combined, these three essential competencies provide the team the best opportunity to target behaviors that will fulfill the client's request. Correct?"

"For sure, Brett," Toni said, returning to the whiteboard. "Now, with each competency in the framework, we describe a list of behaviors to help people understand the meaning of the competency. For example, here's what it looks like for the competency of adaptability."

ADAPTABILITY BEHAVIORS

- Flexible & Open to New Ideas
- Quick to Adapt to New and Changing Situations
- Adept at Employing Change Management Techniques
- Comfortable with Ambiguity

Experience had taught Toni that it was important to describe the competencies in behavioral terms for people to understand their full meaning.

"I know I sound like a broken record, but you've really got this mapped out in a very user-friendly way," Jim exclaimed.

"Thanks. This will go a long way toward helping your team develop and apply all the competencies listed in the platform," Toni said. *

Everyone paused to let Toni's feedback sink in.

"Toni, thanks for taking the time to answer my question from this morning," Brett said. "This was helpful."

Jim nodded in agreement.

"Glad to hear that," Toni said. "What was most useful part for each of you?"

A complete list of all the competencies included in the operating platform is found in the appendix.

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"For me," Brett replied, "this example shows how competencies overlap and build on each other depending on the situation."

"And for me," Jim said, "it reinforces the need to have multiple competencies developed and available in the team's inventory in order for the team to be effective."

"Here's a question that often comes up when I'm coaching clients on this platform's application," Toni said, "and it deals with managing team conflict: would the team be successful if conflict surfaced in its decision-making process? The answer comes from understanding that these three essential competencies may not be the only competencies that come into play in any particular situation. The competency conflict management, for example, could be applied, if needed. Although it's not one of the "big three" I mentioned earlier, it would become a valuable competency to focus on if conflict surfaced as part of the team's decision-making process."

"Awesome!" Jim replied.

Brett was encouraged, to say the least, after sitting through today's session with Toni and Jim. The company's recent acquisition had provided a timely opportunity to invest in new processes and projects, and both the coaching and the management ideas that Toni brought to the table seemed to be winning examples of these. Although the operating platform introduced by Toni was also new to him, he embraced its application inside his department. He believed it could be a blueprint for the company; for that reason, he wanted to fully understand its application. Since he knew that he worked in a risk-taking culture, he was confident that, if he could get the rest of the upper management team on board, his company's commitment to using Toni's platform would be strong. He planned to share what he'd learned with the rest of the senior leadership team soon.

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