

Creating Better Teams with Authenticity

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Expert Forum



Your conversations about talent are likely too small. Most managers and HR leaders I interact with talk about talent exclusively on the individual level. Everyone is fighting the so-called “war for talent.” And while engaging and retaining talented individuals certainly matters, we do not do work as individuals. More and more work, decision-making, and problem solving is being done by teams. Does your organization know how to create better, more talented teams?

We seem to be clinging to the idea that if we simply group smart people together we will end up with smart groups; but it doesn’t work that way. At the group level, individual ability becomes a fairly small variable in a long equation. There is, in human history, no shortage of examples of groups of really smart individuals who collectively made very poor decisions.

You should continue to care about talented individuals, but you should care every bit as much about building and supporting talented teams—which is a different body of work. Teams have some real advantages over individuals when it comes to creativity, quality of decision making, and level of buy-in. However, they’re rarely able to live up to their potential or fully aggregate the talent they have access to. A good place to start? Authenticity. Authenticity is essential to creating better teams.

The smartest teams are the ones where the individual members continue to think for themselves—and this does not happen on its own. Social pressure, power differential, maladaptive meeting and communication practices, and conflict-avoidant behavior are all very common social dynamics that encourage people to keep their ideas and questions to themselves.

Google collected a bunch of data on internal teams in an effort to identify the key drivers of high team performance. Number one on their list was psychological safety, which they defined as an environment “in which team members feel safe to taking risks and being vulnerable in front of each other.”

What do you do to promote and reward unique and authentic participation? And just as importantly, what do you do to push back on those dynamics that make it difficult? Answer these questions and you’ll be on your way to creating better teams