

TEAM SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE EXERCISES

BY: PHIL SHEARRER, APERIO TEAM ENGINEER

FOR WHEN YOU NEED BUY-IN ON A NEW PROJECT

Exercise 1: Talent Storming

In the problem-solving process, brainstorming is an effort to find a new, successful, or targeted way to accomplish a goal, and concludes with a well thought out strategy to achieve said goal. After a strategy has been chosen it is time for the hard work to begin. At this point, in most meetings, we tend to divvy up the work by making a list of action items and then asking for volunteers or delegating tasks to the person whose work role responsibilities best match the task. Often, at this point, all the good ideas suddenly become someone else's ideas.

Talent storming is different – we start by asking participants to share what kind of work they are most interested in performing. This can be very affirming as other members of the team acknowledge the contributor's proficiency and talent in the areas they mention. Then we state the problem and get out of the way. Instead of asking: Who will do what by when? We ask a different question: What wants to Happen?

Try it. Ask your team members to brag on each other's skill sets and natural affinities. They can do this publically or by writing their thoughts on post it notes. Everyone needs to share what talent they see in each other person. Then, clearly state the problem at hand. Then ask, how could we use what we do best to solve this problem. As team members share ways they might contribute their talents – you craft a solution out of these contributions. The result? Affirmation and buy-in.

FOR WHEN YOUR TEAM NEEDS MORE AWARENESS

EXERCISE 2: Exclusively Inclusive/Inclusively Exclusive

This activity is designed to raise awareness about a team's collective but unspoken similarity bias. As humans we love to be around people we feel a connection to. Connection often facilitates trust and good communication. However, because it is an implicit bias, it may not always register that connecting with people similar to ourselves can also cut us off from people with other perspectives, values, and resources.

The activity can be "played" two ways. Both require an open and honest conversation and a scribe to keep notes. The scribe can use a white board or a flip chart or some other recording method that captures the group's voice and makes it immediately observable.

Try It: Exclusively Inclusive

1. First the facilitator asks the group to list perspectives, talents, ages, genders, etc. that they feel are missing from the team.
2. Second, as the list grows, challenge the team to think of other co-workers in the company or customers who might be great resources to fill in the team's missing elements. Label this list is the "exclusion" list. The exclusion list represents the team's potential blind spots. For instance, if the group consists of all English speakers, the team's blind spot may include non-English speakers.
3. Thirdly, challenge the team to invite the perspectives, genders, etc. annotated on the inclusion list to provide perspective and feedback on the team's problems, products, and processes.

And for a very different conversation...

Try It: Inclusively Exclusive

1. As above, the facilitator asks the group to list the shared talents, ages, genders, perspectives that characterize their own group. This list should represent only elements that every person in the group shares in common. This is the "inclusion list." For instance, if three members of the group speak French but the rest don't, French language proficiency would *not* go on the list.
2. As this list grows, challenge the team to think of other co-workers in the company or customers who share most of these same elements as the team.
3. Ask the team what advantages and disadvantages they have when it comes to solving problems, gaining perspective or improving processes.

WHEN YOU NEED TO ALLEVIATE SOME TEAM TENSION

EXERCISE 3: Just the Facts

This activity provides a more objective way to deal with challenging times at work. Our brains love to take in information and make sense of it. This interpretation of the world around us has to happen fast so that we can take appropriate action. Often, our reaction involves no conscious consideration or decision-making involved at all. Teams suffering with low trust frequently jump to conclusions about the intentions behind things said or done at work.

The interpretations we make are stories we tell ourselves. Like a tabloid headline, our brain's hyper-sensitivity to threat tends to emphasize the more dramatic negative narratives. We all hear about the cost-cutting initiative for instance but some spin the news into anxiety about lay-offs, while others seem better able to dial down their fears and stay productive.

This is where a *Just the Facts* exercise can help. You convene the team to talk about whatever elephant is squatting in your cube farm. You make it clear that the point of group time is to help us think objectively and stay productive.

Try it. Begin by stating one objective fact about the proposed merger, relocation or whatever the crisis du jour is for this week. In turn, ask each other team member to add to the list of facts. It is helpful to note these where all can see them. Once everyone has stated a fact, make two columns – label one “end of the world as we know it” and one “silver linings”. Then proceed back around the circle asking each person to add both one fear and one cheer to the appropriate lists. Remind them that these new additions must not be factual, you may only list subjective feelings and speculative opinions. Once each person has contributed to all three lists, ask them if tomorrow at work they will commit to only giving time an attention to the list of Facts – ignoring the other two categories. You’ll be surprised at the results. Publically, surfacing our fears this way and differentiating the facts from our feelings breaks the spell of hidden fears. It gives each team member a clear reference point to focus their thinking throughout the change initiative.