

Is it OK to have a big "Me" in the Team?



There is a somewhat cynical cliché in the executive development world that says there is no "I" in the word team but there is a "ME" if you look closely. Given the Olympics are about to start it a good moment to reflect on the importance of team work in our business careers and organisations.

In my experience there is always an assumption that people need to work as a team! But it pays to reflect on what people are doing and what the goals and objectives are. Sometimes leaders push the idea of teamwork when in fact people do not need to work as a team because they are a group. To be a team you need a shared objective - to have something to benefit each other or to lose together.

When thinking of teams, the Olympics raise the difference between what I call **co-operative** teams and **collaborative** teams. Football, basketball and athletic relay events typically demand co-operative teams. Unless you pass me the ball or relay baton we are not going to succeed. We have to work together to achieve a result. Whereas people who will run the 100 metres or swim in the pool are members of what I call a collaborative team. I make a contribution to a bigger team objective but your performance is not dependent on mine - we don't have to do that much together to succeed we just need to buy into the bigger goal and do the best we can. Many individual athletes have big egos - they indeed need a big "ME" to often help for their confidence in their own event - it is not necessarily a problem as the bigger GB team will benefit if they succeed by the medal points contribution they make.

The implications are that leaders should think about the roles people have and not automatically force co-operative teamwork on everyone in their organisations. With collaborative teamwork

you need to ensure that everyone is clear about the bigger goal and objectives and that they have a sense of belonging to the final goal. Obsessing and worrying about how everyone is getting along - very important in a co-operative team- is not always necessary. You might recall how in recent times Fabio Capello was criticised for dropping certain players from the England team following certain private life disclosures. But in my view he was right to do so as co-operative teams need to have high levels of trust and have to work together to win.

Key learning:

- Think about how you approach the concept of teamwork in your organisation?
- What roles and functions do your people need to undertake?
- Are they working in a co-operative team environment or a collaborative one?
- Are you ensuring that the goals and objectives are clearly communicated and that people know what their contribution is?
- Are you un-necessarily forcing and worrying about the co-operative teamwork issue in a collaborative environment?

Step back and reflect those questions to find out that it is OK to have a '**ME**' in the team!

By Mark Thomas

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