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Hans Samios - How to Work Personality Issues Without Sounding Like a Marriage Guidance Counsellor?

This idea has been floating around in my head for some time and so decided to pull together a proposal for the Agile 2016 Conference.

This session was accepted.

Abstract

Ever had a situation on a team where personalities are such that they are unable to work an issue? It happens all the time, doesn't it? I don't know about you but I've found that the advice for dealing with these situations is often very "touchy, feely" to the point where I feel I am being asked to become something I am not - something like a marriage guidance counsellor. Worse, I have found working this way creates an additional barrier and actually gets in the way of working the issue. I think this is because of the personalities that I am working with - people who see themselves as more analytical and introverted - but I suspect this is also partly an expression of my discomfort in using approaches that do not fit in with my personality. In either case, different "tools" are required to get good results.

The overall theme of this session is the development of approaches that are "experimental", "observational" and "data-driven". These approaches help drain negative emotional input to addressing the issue at hand while allowing the issue to be worked and resolved. The basis of the workshop is a presentation of thinking, ideas and approaches that I have used. Table exercises will be used to generate additional understanding as well as gather up experiences and approaches that you have.

Materials

["How to Work Personality Issues Without Sounding Like a Marriage Guidance Counsellor?" \(As PDF, Final\)](#)

As presenter:

["How to Work Personality Issues Without Sounding Like a Marriage Guidance Counsellor?" \(As PPT, Final\)](#)

[Presentation Timings](#)

References Used

The following references were used in the presentation:

- [What Google Learned From Its Quest To Build The Perfect Team](#)
- [Navigating Conflict on Agile Teams: Why "Resolving" Conflict Won't Work](#)
- [How to Preempt Team Conflict?](#)
- ["Conflict Resolution" - Daniel Dana](#)

Photos from the Session





Preparation

The following notes are related to the preparation of the session.

Agenda Outline

Outline of the agenda for the session:

- Introduction
 - Reason for this session
 - Examples of “touchy / feely” approaches that did not work for me
- Table exercise: Characteristics of approaches that you tried but did not give you the expected result. Facilitation note: de-brief with example from each table
- Examples of approaches that have worked for me (note: describe situation and the approach, with description of whether it worked). Approaches include:

- Activities such as “each team member does private brainstorm on a sticky on issue to address then pass note around team members to fill in / add to” to uncover “the elephant in the room”.
- Turning emotion into data so it can be dealt with either directly such as using fist of five vote to gauge where people are and dot-dot vote for buy-in on priorities) or indirectly, such as anonymous surveys to gather information.
- Generate data / metrics to allow direct observation of the issue and develop appropriate response.
- Using the idea of “lets run an experiment” to take the edge off of trying something new.
- Bring in external (unbiased) facilitator to allow more open conversation.
- Sometimes just be blunt and say what everyone is thinking.
- Live “360 review” process (note: if facilitating, you have to go first – treat it like a “roast”).
- Table exercise: Discuss issue and approach you’ve taken. Facilitation: de-brief with a number of examples from each table
- Concluding remarks / close
 - Review with approaches we have heard

My own experiences indicate that there are a number of tools that can help in dealing with complex personal issues (see above for some ideas). I expect there are others and this session will allow us to gather these up. And I suspect that sometimes you will just have to sound like a marriage guidance counsellor when dealing with some situations and so I think we should discuss this as well.

Additional Ideas

An interesting article came out in the New York Times about building teams from the experience at Google. Some quotes I might be able to use to make presentation more interesting:

- “It’s easier to talk about our feelings when we can point to a number.” - Sakaguchi from [What Google Learned From Its Quest To Build The Perfect Team](#)
- “Don’t underestimate the power of giving people a common platform and operating language.” - Rozovsky from [What Google Learned From Its Quest To Build The Perfect Team](#)
- “Psychological safety is “a sense of confidence that the team will not embarrass, reject or punish someone for speaking up,” Edmondson wrote in a study published in 1999. “It describes a team climate characterized by interpersonal trust and mutual respect in which people are comfortable being themselves.”” - Edmondson from [What Google Learned From Its Quest To Build The Perfect Team](#)

Some good ideas in [Scrum Master or Arm-chair Psychologist With Angela Johnson](#) that I should be able to leverage provided I can get the tone right.

Feel like ideas from Book “Lean Enterprise” by Jez Humble can be applied to teams. Want to encourage team to become generative. Lead by example.

1. Pathological - people hoard information to make themselves look better, generates a large amount of fear and threat, look for scapegoats
2. Bureaucratic - protect department, maintain turf, insist on rules, seek justice

3. Generative - focus on mission, everything subordinated to good performance, look for basic problems in the system

Some good ideas from SAFe Scrum Master. New one for me was the "evaporating cloud" method (although I should have remembered). Other ideas include:

- Role of facilitator - "Looks for where (s)he could help without diminishing the commitment of others"
- "productive / shared" view versus "ideological / personal".
- Positive conflict is required for high performance teams / negative conflict kills high performance teams.

Another thing to do is to set up working agreements early to make sure we have a common goal. Means that we can refer to these to get past more sticky situations.

Other ideas:

- Lead by example
- Be mindful of your own behavior
- Powerful questions - what surprised you ...
- Don't leap immediately to "solution" mode - calm the situation down, get information (it is worth than useless to get in the middle of conflict if you have not understood the true causes)
- Try to learn about conflict resolution approaches - study it - since, again, if you are in a conflict and you don't know what you are doing then you are a 3rd protagonist, a participant in the conflict, and not helping.
- We are not trained in resolving conflict. Most of us learned how to deal with conflict from our

parents growing up. Since divorce rates run at 50% this has probably not been effective



This idea carries further. If we are to have difficult conversations, then need to have a positive balance in our "team ledger" so we can do this. This means preparing ahead of the need - working together, establishing culture etc.

Think about the positive / negative ledger for your interactions with a team. Use social times to generate more positive items on the ledger. Or perhaps learning sessions (lunch and learn), book reports, etc.

Also note there might be something in General Stanley McChrystal's in "Team of Teams" although this might be less "team specific".

Take idea someone has and add to it - "yes, and" versus "but" or "no".

Need to be really clear about the premise. I have no problem with helping people understand personality profiles on teams, improved listening skills for team members, and so on. When this is part of the behavior of the team then these things will work. But there is a problem when we try to teach people these skills in the middle of a problem. You can see people get their backs up when they hear things like "I think this is what I heard you say" and "this is my reaction to this statement" and so on. I think part of this is also caused by "assumed superiority" that people seem to take ("let me help you").

Image we are trying to avoid is something like [Grief Counselling](#). Perhaps show picture of my Mum to get

message across - she was a marriage guidance counsellor. Just provide examples of where I've used these ideas. Coach of coaches etc.

Add something like "sometimes they are just jerks".

Add approach - ask them their opinion.

Add section about preemptive conflict resolution. See [How to Preempt Team Conflict?](#) - How to Preempt Team Conflict? I thought this article from HBR was pretty useful. It takes the discussion we have about setting up team working agreements one step further, suggesting a series of relatively short meetings to level set people's views of each other based on how team members react to how people look, act, speak, think and feel.

See if I can tell a story about my learning journey of conflict resolution. Start with divorce, marriage guidance counsellor, etc. What I learned from those experiences and how I applied to work situation. End with family now and what we have seen. Not perfect. But better.

Add joke / comic about conflict resolution at the beginning?

Watch Lyssa video on conflict resolution [Navigating Conflict on Agile Teams: Why "Resolving" Conflict Won't Work](#).

Plus idea from <https://www.agileconnection.com/article/unsolvable-conflict-agile-teams> that sometimes conflict just is and the way to address it is to create more positive interactions, not just negative ones.

Quotes from "[Conflict Resolution](#)" - Daniel Dana

- "Every tree was once a sapling, every adult was once a child, and every formal dispute was once an informal conflict."
- "We can't fight our way out of conflict, but we can think our way out of it."
- "Preventive mediation is the ultimate in simplicity: 'Mediation without an event.'"

[TeamPerformance](#), [Team](#), [Conflict](#), [Personalities](#), [Agile2016](#), [Conference](#), [Proposal](#), [FAQ](#)

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