

exploring

Collective Intelligence

The Relation Capability

Supplementary text

RELATION - THE ABILITY TO CREATE AN OPEN SOCIAL CLIMATE WHERE MEMBERS TRUST EACH OTHER

The relation capability of the CICS model refers to a group's ability to create an open and safe social climate where team members have trust in each other's capabilities and intentions. It means creating personal trust between individuals and building confidence in each other's skills, as well as in the group's ability to tackle difficult issues. It is a kind of collective self-confidence.

The social climate is a good indicator of the degree of knowledge integration in an organization since it opens up for positive reflection within groups, which in turn enables utilization of group members' knowledge. However, we seldom come across organizations with established strategies to support the social climate in its groups.

Relation



Social processes

The reason why the social climate is so important when working in a group is that when people work with common assignments, they always experience what we call a social process. This means that people create an image of themselves, their role, other individuals, the group, and their surroundings when interacting. Thus, the social process is simultaneous with the exchange of knowledge – they cannot be separated.

Defensive behavior

The standard behavior of people in organizations tends to be defensive. Such a behavior stems from the relationship described above, namely the relationship between using our knowledge and our self-image. Knowledge is tied to the individual and his or her perception of self (identity), which makes knowledge integration a sensitive and risky process as people will have a hard time separating whether opinions about a statement one made regard one's *knowledge*, or one's *self*. This implies that humans generally are careful in sharing as well as receiving knowledge – there is a risk of saying something that will affect relationships, self-image, or position in the group, in a negative way. Hence, every knowledge-based statement

one makes will be evaluated by oneself based on such thoughts – and this evaluation will, in turn, affect how one chooses to express oneself in later statements.

Controlling and defensive behavior

In the complex interaction among people, one will experience a basic feeling of insecurity. To handle this insecurity, we strive towards controlling everything as much as possible. This means that we censor what we say, but also what we perceive. When in doubt, we find explanations that suit us. For example, if a person states a fact that contradicts our pre-meeting disposition, we choose to explain that to ourselves as the person not understanding or being a bad person, depending on our relation. Listening to someone's perspective is automatically perceived as taking a risk, as it brings uncertainty. Defensive behavior obstructs listening and prevents inaccurate understandings from being corrected. It also impedes the ability to find productive problem settings and drives premature problems solving. All in all, this behavior is what in practice makes us avoid learning and what makes us bad listeners. It can lead to the development of vicious circles of communication within groups.

The importance of well-functioning relations

To achieve well-functioning relations, groups need to establish trust in each other and develop the ability to create a psychologically safe environment. It is critical for the group's ability to collaborate. Trust in each other's skills, knowledge and expertise also increase psychological safety since it improves the group's perception of its own ability. This, in turn, enhances understanding of the importance of sharing knowledge and if the group has high confidence in their knowledge we can also expect that the desire to try to understand each other is higher.

Trust in each other's knowledge enables the group to use the members specialized knowledge more frequently and willingly. The reason behind it, is that if an individual assumes that someone else is unable to perform his or her task, he or she will spend attention monitoring that other person. This will steal attention from the knowledge sharing the group needs to perform well.

A great deal of the social signal system is related to how we listen to each other. When someone has said something, that person is always sensitive for the social signals he or she gets in response and is therefore highly attentive to other peoples' reactions. Research shows that the *way* in which we listen, that is, what social signals we send out, is important.

Summary

In conclusion, the relationship capability is about building trusting relationships within a group to increase psychological safety. Strong relationship capability can be seen in group norms and behaviors characterized by openness, both in terms of openness towards

differences among individuals and openness to knowledge-based risk taking. Openness is important since it allows people to use knowledge that they feel uncertain about – it provides a feeling of safety, assuring that what one says will not be used against oneself. If a group has high confidence in all members' knowledge, one can also expect that the desire to try to understand each other is higher.

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