



Team Building and Group Dynamics

BY ELI BECKER

Creating and fostering a culture of teamwork requires trust, collaboration, and accountability.

Forty exceptional employees, six short months, and the responsibility to one reputable Fortune 100 company: That is what Darci Kleindl was handed when she accepted a job as the general manager of sales excellence and sales enablement for the Microsoft Business Solutions (MBS) group. She inherited a global team of customer support managers, all of whom work with diverse clientele, including engineers, marketing organizations, consultants, and external customers. She also manages a team of leaders who drive worldwide standards for sales basics, internal and external readiness, and the business rhythm and communications to accelerate the MBS group.

To add to the chaos, this group, which had operated autonomously within Microsoft, faced a large organizational shift when she started: “Our enterprise and small business teams integrated our CRM solutions into the overall business strategy and execution. It took our work from a priority state of 4 to 9 overnight,” she says.

As daunting as her situation seemed, Kleindl wasn’t new to managing dynamic groups or governing complex situations. Her career often has included strategizing on the higher executive level. This time, however, would be different. She planned to implement a comprehensive leadership and team development program that would transform her work culture and provide a foundational structure for her team.



THE COMPANY: Microsoft
www.microsoft.com/en-us/dynamics



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Strategizing for success

Kleindl was resolute in making a lasting impact. “What happens so often is people do a one-time hit when it comes to team and leadership development. People are put in one class and we expect it to change their world overnight,” she explains.

Her vision involved stabilizing a culture of trust, collaboration, and accountability—one that would resonate beyond just her direct reports. To do this, she sought the help of a trusted advisor—Bruce Leamon, an authorized partner of The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team—who jumped at the opportunity.

“Darci understands that you can have great products, you can have phenomenal software, you can have the smartest people, but if they’re not playing together, it’s never going to get you ahead,” Leamon says. “I recommended that she use The Five Behaviors; it’s the operating system for teamwork. Once that’s established you have a framework to build from.”

The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team is a comprehensive team development program based on the work of Patrick Lencioni. It helps both team members and leaders understand how their unique group dynamic can work together to build a more effective team and achieve sustainable results.

The facilitated sessions help teams to comprehend where they fall within five distinct pillars of teamwork: trust, conflict, commitment, accountability, and results. It uses the Everything DiSC behavioral assessment to establish a neutral language and help participants have productive conversations to develop within these five competency areas.

With The Five Behaviors as the foundation, Kleindl and Leamon quickly developed the Organizational Capital Program. The six-month program establishes a common language for the team to communicate, standardize expectations to improve accountability, strengthen leadership abilities, and create an emotionally intelligent culture.

“I wanted to give my colleagues an end-to-end picture of who they are, from their own understanding as well as from other people’s perspective—to learn that maybe you have a dominant personality style and be able to understand how that relates to your emotional intelligence or to your leadership skills,” Kleindl explains.

The team training session

Thirty-six tentative colleagues participated in the two-day, off-site training session. Leamon started by establishing conversation based on vulnerability-based trust.

Before they could get into discussions on dealing with conflict, their collective idea of commitment, or holding one another accountable, the team needed to trust that what they were saying would be respected and heard. They shared personal backgrounds to learn about one another’s perspectives and how they might relate to their colleagues in ways beyond work. They spoke candidly on what makes them comfortable and uncomfortable in a work environment. They discussed

their team’s core values and their vision for themselves and the company.

“It allowed us to understand who people are. Combined with information from DiSC, we could establish a common language and move swiftly through the rest of the program,” Leamon says.

The impact

The Organizational Capital Program is built on the lessons learned from that initial The Five Behaviors session. The impact seen within the MBS group has been multifaceted, explains Kleindl. “I think this team has increased in visibility substantially as far as what they do and the impact. Our relationship network has grown, systems have been put in place to help with productivity, our planning is more succinct, and the team is connecting more one-on-one with people to explain their roles.”

In terms of accountability, there was a notable shift. “They’ve come to understand that they don’t always have to say ‘yes.’ ... They trust each other and understand how to have healthy conflict when situations are off-loaded to us that really should not be our job in the first place. We’re clear on what we’re accountable for.”

The Five Behaviors is a reliable tool that helped lay the foundation for further development. But a large reason why it was successful was because people felt heard.

“I got emails from people saying, ‘No one has ever invested in me in this way. It’s fantastic!’” That sort of investment in individuals served well for Kleindl, her team, and also the network beyond her team. The MBS group now has a reputation for sustaining an enviable culture of trust, collaboration, and accountability.

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Prices valid through December 31, 2015. *TD* magazine is published by the Association for Talent Development, formerly ASTD.

071426.31610

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