

Just My Cup of Team



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Resource Type: Risk eNews

Topic: General

“We may be hard-wired for power struggles, greed, and workplace conflicts. But as social creatures, we also derive enormous pleasure from creating, sharing, and implementing new ideas with other people.” – Amy C. Edmondson

What better time than January, the start of a new year, to experiment with novel ways to champion your organization’s mission, set goals, and resolve to do better? Last week I finished a terrific book on the timely topic of teaming. In *Teaming: How Organizations Learn, Innovate and Compete in the Knowledge Economy*, Professor Amy C. Edmondson uses the term ‘teaming’ to describe ‘teamwork on the fly.’ Tackling risk head-on requires planning, agile learning, and candid communication; effective teaming is the epitome of these practices.

My takeaways from this insightful resource include:

- **Learning is fundamental.** We often tell our consulting clients that an important responsibility of the risk team is to inspire and support the desire to learn. We’ve seen firsthand how the most engaged staff members are those who are active learners; we’ve also heard that during exit interviews a departing team member often reveals frustration with a lack of learning and advancement opportunities. What’s the lesson? The team that learns and grows together... stays together.
- **True teaming takes more than a few clicks.** Edmondson reminds us that anything worth doing is probably hard to do. Have you ever been on a video call with a team but felt disconnected? Technology’s lens makes us virtually ‘present’ but often it feels like some are just ‘phoning it in’ and not being truly present. I remember giving my first webinar using a platform where I could see every participant’s face. I found it energizing until a couple of attendees got up and walked away from their remote workstations! My energy was drained, a feeling akin to when someone at an in-person meeting dozes off or begins playing with their mobile phone. Edmondson cautions us that “The information technology that has allowed us to communicate instantaneously across continents, however, sometimes leaves us with a false sense of confidence that productive teamwork is merely a click away.”
- **Reframe to try a different approach.** Teamwork can be enjoyable and invigorating; occasionally, however, teamwork is dreaded, dreary or downright dull. The risk of a dreary team exercise increases when it feels like you’re doing the same work over and over again while hoping for a better or different result. Summarized here are Edmondson’s four practical tactics to reframe and refresh a team effort:
 1. Approach the project with novelty and use it as an exciting opportunity to test out different approaches and learn from the process.

2. Visualize your participation as critical to success yet be mindful that synergy engenders triumph.
3. Recognize that through teamwork the strongest success will be achieved.
4. Internalize the prior affirmations as truth.

- **Tear down the boundaries that constrain your team.** One of the most powerful lessons from *Teaming* is the idea that boundaries and barriers can derail effective teamwork. Many teams underestimate these obstructions but are left wondering why, how and where the once tenacious team went astray. The author reminds us that *both* team leaders and team members must learn to “span the boundaries within and between organizations that stifle the flow of information and inhibit collaboration.” She points to several simple, ‘ordinary’ behaviors as powerful tools for overcoming physical distance, status and knowledge boundaries:

1. asking for help,
2. offering help, and
3. expressing curiosity.

Finally, Edmondson explains that “Generating ideas to solve problems is the currency of the future; teaming is the way to develop, implement, and improve those ideas.” Teaming as described above is an invaluable tool to proactively tackle concerning risks *and* responding in the wake of a risk event your team was unable to avoid.

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