Innovation in Teams
By RapidBI

Effective teams are to some extent a paradox.

On one hand there is a need for diversity, too many with the same behaviours and thinking can allow the work of a team drift, on the other hand the differences between members of the team can be causes of confusion, misunderstanding and conflict.

Getting the balance right is critical - its hard work and many teams muddle through it learning to accommodate each other and delivering mediocre performance. As Quentin Crisp suggests "*There was no need to do any housework at all. After the first four years the dirt doesn't get any worse.*" (The Naked Civil Servant, 1968).

Today's world does not afford the luxury of not getting the best from permanent or virtual teams. The pressure is on to deliver every ounce of performance leveraging knowledge and skills to the full to improve and innovate.

Whereas in the past many teams were relatively stable the pace of business life and change means that most teams need to form fast and build performance quickly, and what is more the membership is likely to be dynamic as careers move and appropriate expertise is introduced at different stages in the project.

Tuckman's[1] model of team formation suggests the team experience several stages to build the team relationships and the task execution namely forming, storming, norming and performing. A good practical model that brings some insight into the journey of team development – it may provide a roadmap but fails to identify what each member of the team brings to the collaborative effort.

Research by Meredith Belbin[2] provides more behavioural meat to the bones by exploring the behavioural preferences people have when they are working together in teams. His team roles – there are nine of them provide an interesting insight into elements of the task and the style they choose to adopt. Most people have a couple of strong preferences so can sacrifice a role if needed to accommodate others better suited to a specific role. Other models of team roles such as the Margerison & McCann[3] Team Management Wheel or Parker's Team Players have similar behavioural descriptions and emphasise that the mix or blend of profile or preferences is paramount to the successful collaborative performance of the task.

All these models are generic and do not take account of the context in which the team working takes place. For example if the task of the team is an improvement project or for innovation what might be the impact on individual roles? How might I understand how I specifically relate to others in the team which may comprise internal personnel or cross functional or even collaborative teams extending across the organisation boundaries into suppliers or clients?

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[1] Tuckman BW & Henson MAC (1977)
[2] Belbin RM Management Teams –why they succeed or fail (1981)
[3] McCann R & Margerison C Team Management Wheel (1984)

Well to understand this we need to understand the innovation equation, innovation is a multiple of creativity and risk taking and each of us has a distinct blend of these attributes. Underpinned by behavioural drivers the innovation equation developed by Dr Jacqueline Byrd[4] gives a unique insight into our innovation capacity and through activating the drivers we can develop our capacity even further. Dr Byrd has developed an inventory that helps measure this capacity called the Creatrix™. A simple online self assessment survey yields normative data against each of the drivers and characterises the innovation capacity through an orientation profile. This behavioural profile describes individual approaches and styles as they specifically relate to the context of innovation, that is, the action of introducing new methods, ideas or products.

Context based profiling is more readily accessible to teams that are working with innovation, it makes sense, and through sharing profiles and preferences effective roles can be negotiated striking the right balance between thought and action, capitalising on good ideas that may otherwise be lost and not prematurely acting on others. The combinations of the profiles help maximise contribution and create clarity around roles. Conflicts are recognised for what they are and are use constructively within the context of the team's task. Dreamers can generate the concepts, connections and ideas but Challengers can test them. Team members understand that they all bring something unique to the innovation process.

This grounding in the reality of the task context is particularly important for those who are part of virtual teams or who work across organisation boundaries where the pressure on their time from conflicting demands requires rapid assimilation to hit the ground running.

Whilst the team will still need to negotiate their way through the stages of team development an understanding of the innovation equation and their individual profiles gives a head start in appreciating the resources and strengths that each brings to innovation task at hand.

For more information on the Creatrix™ or other cultural change & diagnostic tools see www.creatrix.com & www.rapidbi.com

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[4] Byrd J & Brown PL The Innovation Equation (2003)