Rainer Krumm & Sonja Wittig

30 Minutes

Team Culture

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You'll know more in 30 minutes!

This book is designed to enable you to absorb concise and sound information in a short time. With the help of a guidance system, you will be led through the book. This will allow you to grasp the essentials within your personal time allotment (from 10 to 30 minutes).

Short reading time
You can read the whole book in 30 minutes. If you have less time, read only those passages that contain important information.

- **All important information is printed in grey.**

- Key questions with page references at the beginning of each chapter allow for quick orientation: you turn directly to the page that closes your knowledge gap.

- *Numerous summaries within the chapters allow for skimming.*

- The "Fast Reader" at the end of the book summarizes all important information.

- An index makes it easier to find what you are looking for.

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Foreword

"What values do we have as a team? How do we currently live them? And what should we adapt so that we can align our thoughts and actions even more closely with our values in the future?" These were the questions to which the newly formed executive board of a group with 50,000 employees sought answers. Actually, the board of directors wanted to deal with the values of the entire organization in a workshop—but they realized that they did not yet have a clear picture of even themselves as a team. They realized that they first had to clarify for themselves how they wanted to work together as a board and present themselves to the outside world. To do this, they first reflected on and defined their team values. In a second step, they tried, among other things, to create their processes, structure, and strategy and align them as closely as possible to these values: "What individual values does each member bring to the board? What is the core competency of our team, and where do we need to expand our skills? How do we ensure that we stay on course and succeed as a team in all of this?"

Employees, leadership, skills, processes, structure, strategy, values—these factors are part and parcel of team culture. Their design makes a team a distinctive group of people working together on a task.

Each team has these seven elements in a completely specific shape. Team culture is not static but is constantly adapting to the current circumstances and chal-

lenges in accordance with internal or external pressure for change.

In this book you will learn how to better understand and classify team culture on the basis of Professor Clare W. Graves's model of step-by-step value development. In addition, you will learn how you can consciously initiate and shape the development of a team culture— as the management team did in the example given above.

We wish you every success in recognizing and creating a team culture that fits your specific context and makes you and your team successful!

Rainer Krumm & Sonja Wittig

30 MINUTES

1. The importance of team culture

"Culture eats strategy for breakfast!" This is one of the most frequently used quotes on the subject of change. It is often attributed to Peter Drucker (1909–2005), an American pioneer of modern management theory. The quote illustrates the fundamental importance of culture for organizations' prospects of success: culture plays a decisive role in determining what the people involved think about a goal and, thus, also which steps, if any, they take to achieve it. That is why every goal can be as ambitious as it is ambitious, every strategy as well thought out: if the culture does not support both, the project is doomed to failure.

Peter Drucker made his statement with a view to the entire organization. However, the actors involved are usually part of teams, which in turn can have their own (sub)cultures. We therefore focus on **culture at team level**. In particular, we focus on teams in companies. However, our topics are also transferable to teams in, for example, a volunteer or sports environment.

1.1 Why teams often fail

The word *team* is on everyone's lips these days—but few people know the origin of this term. Sure, the word comes from English. But did you know that in the Middle Ages it was used to refer to a large number of draft animals? Back then, *pulling together* was understood to mean something completely different than it does today. In the past, team members were harnessed to the cart and driven by the farmer to maximum power. Fortunately, today's managers are no longer allowed to use a whip—and even if they were, they would hardly reach their goal with it.

Accordingly, the dictionary defines team today as **"a group of people who work together on a task."** The task determines who is part of the team and how long the team will last. Teams find each other; teams dissolve again; team members change. For while in the Middle Ages, ox and horse could not resist being part of a team, today's teams are based on voluntariness. As a rule, each team member can terminate his or her membership and leave the team at any time.

It is impossible to imagine today's working world without teams. They solve existing problems and develop innovations. According to Professor Rolf van Dick, social psychologist and vice president of the Johann Wolfgang Goethe University Frankfurt am Main, the trend toward teamwork has two reasons. First, technological progress is leading to increasing specialization—in the

case of organ transplantation, for example, one surgeon is no longer responsible for the entire operation, but various experts work hand in hand. Second, customers and consumers are demanding new products or solutions to their problems faster than ever before. These expectations can be satisfied only if entire teams are entrusted with the tasks, according to van Dick's thesis (see *WirtschaftsWoche* 48/2017, p. 21).

The dark side of teamwork

But is teamwork always the method of choice? Is teamwork in the end perhaps only a "euphemism of the mediocre for jointly produced average," as the above-mentioned article from *WirtschaftsWoche* provocatively asks? Anyone who has ever worked in a team knows that teamwork also has its dark sides: meetings without end, an overflowing email inbox (e.g., because everyone puts everyone else in CC for everything), political games and cat fights among the team members . . . In principle, a group has more potential than an individual to solve a task, but it can also go wrong in the process.

Numerous studies show that **teams are not necessarily more productive and successful**:

- In the nineteenth century, Max Ringelmann discovered that more people does not automatically result in more performance. He had men pull on a rope and measured the force used: if one person pulled alone, he developed a force of 63 kg. Two people together

pulled with a force of only 118 kg; that is, 8 kg less than their actual potential. Three people applied a pulling force of 160 kg—29 kg less than possible! This loss of productivity with increased group size is called the **Ringman effect**, which can also be observed in other tasks such as brainstorming. This can be explained by a loss of coordination and motivation. The latter occurs above all when the individual contribution of a person is not recognizable as such, but the person is involved in the overall result of the group (cf. Metz-Göckel 2003, pp. 10–12).

- Benjamin Walker divided 158 students into 33 teams after an individual examination of their conscientiousness. In each team one person had a low sense of duty. Each team was given a set of tasks and the information that they would all receive the same grade depending on their team score. The result was clear: the one person with the low sense of duty pulled down the performance and satisfaction of the whole team. The frustration of having a "free rider" in the team ensured that the others did not try as hard as they could have, so that one person's lack of performance was not compensated for by the rest of the group. Walker's attempt thus underlines the **"one bad apple" theory**—one rotten apple spoils the whole basket (see Burke 2011).

These examples illustrate that teamwork does not necessarily lead to the hoped-for results. There are many

other mechanisms and reasons besides the loss of coordination and motivation that cause teams to fail colossally.

Self-reflection
Before you read on, consider the following questions:
- In which teams have I worked for a longer period of time?
- When and for what reasons were we successful as a team?
- When and for what reasons did our team performance fall short of its actual potential?

It is impossible to imagine today's working world, which is characterized by fast pace and specialization, without teams. But working in a team does not always lead to the hoped-for results. Studies have shown that team performance can be significantly smaller in total than the potential of each individual.

1.2 Success through fit

In our experience, teams are most successful when they "fit like a glove": the individual people must fit the group. The group must fit the organization. The organization must fit the market. And the market in turn must fit the individual person.
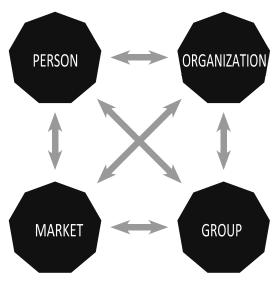
Fig. 1: Interplay of the fit of person, group, organization, and market.

Example: *Imagine a sales team that has been representing its product very successfully in the German market for five years. Now the product is to be transferred to Eastern Europe. The skills of the employees and the motivation of the whole team are consistently high. But regardless of this, the team there cannot build on its old successes in Germany. It lacks the ability to connect to the Eastern European market.*

The innovative work culture of Google is often cited today as a positive example of how teamwork can

work. But if such a cocreative, agile team suddenly finds itself in a patriarchal, medium-sized company in a rural area, the team will most likely no longer be successful. But why exactly does this not fit together? How can we make tangible what fits and what doesn't? This requires a closer look at what exactly makes up the culture of teams.

Teams are most successful when the fit of person, organization, group, and market is right. If these four components are in harmony, there is no need for change. However, if only one of these areas changes, an imbalance arises and the other areas are required to adapt accordingly.

1.3 Team culture and the 7-S model

Team culture is comparable to wind: Everyone knows it is there. Everyone feels it. It can feel very light and pleasant, but it can also unleash great destructive power. It is not visible, but only shows itself indirectly through what it does. Nobody doubts its existence— only, we cannot really grasp it.

Accordingly, there is **no clear and generally valid definition of the term team culture**. However, a German industry norm, DIN 69905 on "Project management, terms," dared to define project culture as "the