Increasing Team Capacity to Handle Complexity

Openness and Trust

Openness and trust are expressions that usually characterise well functioning, harmonious and productive working groups. The issue is how such an atmosphere is to be created and sustained by leaders and group members.

Mutual trust is a prerequisite for individuals in a group to dare to be open with each other. Yet, openness between people is what creates a sense of trust and safety. These two concepts are obviously mutually dependent on each other. This aspect is often the reason why some of the deadlock situations might occur in groups. If my view is "I can't be open to you, since I lack the trust between us", and your view is the same about me, we are stuck.
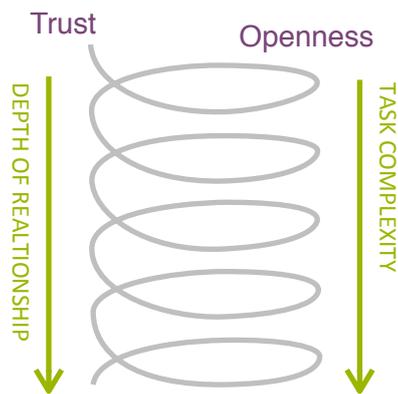
Källa:L J Clemendson (2006)

Starting a Positive Spiral

There is an important difference between these two concepts; my openness I am able to regulate myself. Trust, on the contrary, describes a state in the relation between people that has been deserved or is a consequence of their acting towards each other. The important insight is therefore that I am, as a member of a group, able to start a positive spiral where increased openness leads to increased trust, which then lays the foundation for more openness etc. I always have the choice to be more open than what the trust in the group really admits me to be, and by that contribute to the development and the collaboration atmosphere of the group.

Relations and Performance

How much openness and trust should there be in a group? There are of course many answers to that question. One answer valid for most groups is that the level of openness and trust, or the depth of the relations in the group, has a connection to the task or function of the group. The more difficult and complex the task is, and the more collaboration is needed for the group to keep its functionality, the more depth in the relations between the individuals is needed. "We have to be able to communicate with each other about what is actually important".

Pitfall of Simplification

Groups whose relations are not on a deep enough level required by the current task, usually find different ways to solve this. One common way is to totally avoid dealing with problems that are too difficult and instead keep occupied by other less demanding responsibilities ("coffee machine issues"). This strategy usually finds expression in certain issues always being postponed and put among the last items on the next meeting's agenda. Another frequent phenomenon is when the group deals with problems by over-simplifying them. The problem is handled as if it was less complex than it actually is. Later it is discovered that the issue pops up all over again in different appearances.

Keeping It Up

Building relations in a group is not a linear process where a depth that once was reached always will stay. Groups go up and down in the "spiral" all the time for many different reasons, but if there has been a certain level of openness in the group, it usually is easier to get there again. Competent groups have members that have understood to adjust the communication and openness in the group to the task and the current situation.