



NEWSLETTER

Too Important to Ignore: Team Effectiveness

June 2020



Dear Colleagues,

It's hard to know how to respond to events of the magnitude of those that have been in the headlines, except to acknowledge that the quest for social justice feels really, really, enormous.

As readers will know, I have been arguing for some time that the allocation of corporate profits away from shared prosperity and toward the executive-and-investor group has destroyed good jobs in the United States and decimated the middle class. That perspective will clearly have to expand in light of a system that is also systematically prejudiced.

With the hope of adding a little actionable positivity, I thought it would be useful this month to explore the question of what makes some teams effective, inclusive, and, as

Amy Edmondson would say, fearless.

Great Teams Can Accomplish Extraordinary Things

One of my favorite leadership examples is that of the extraordinary Alan Mulally. He was the CEO who joined Ford Motor Company when it was in deep, dark trouble in 2006. During his eight-year tenure there, he is credited with reviving the company's fortunes in a legendary turnaround whose story became the basis for a best-selling business book. While there were many elements that led to Mulally's success, he would say that at the core was the dismantling of Ford's "Game of Thrones" culture which he replaced with a practice he called "working together," with an emphasis on inclusive, high-trust teamwork among his senior leadership team members.

Slices of Genius

A similar set of leadership and teamwork ideas informed my recent Friday Fireside Chat conversation with Harvard Professor Linda Hill. In her co-authored book *Collective Genius*, she draws a distinction between the kind of leadership that might be suitable when a task is largely well understood and that which is necessary for unearthing creative solutions to new problems. When you need a truly original response, she argues, the job of the leader is creating an environment in which separate slices of genius are woven into a solution that reflects collective genius. The role of the leader is not so much to encourage people to adopt their vision as it is to create the context in which innovative problem solving can take place.

How Thinking About Teams Has Evolved

Like so many other things, teams at work are not what they once were. Teams form and disband at an unprecedented pace. And we're beginning to understand the effects of newer constructs around what makes a team effective—such as Amy Edmondson's discovery of psychological safety—that don't have a place in that model. Edmondson found that an environment in which people are afraid to speak up with divergent data or a disconfirming point of view is an environment in which mistakes are more common and opportunities are overlooked.

Team effectiveness is even harder to create if team members are on opposite ends of deeply polarizing issues, as those that are boiling up in workplaces and communities worldwide. We urgently need to get better at creating effective teams. Click "read more" below to find a few ideas to get you started.

In next month's newsletter, I'll be sharing a research-based, well-vetted diagnostic that you can use with your team to assess its effectiveness and get to the bottom of

any issues that people aren't talking about. **Want to learn more? Contact Missy@ritamcgrath.com to schedule a presentation.**

[Read more](#)

Reading List

A curated roundup of interesting articles and books to get you thinking:

- **Black Lives Matter Is About Both Race and Class.** Could protests over racial justice also have the potential to spur a new labor movement in the US and bring forth a new era for economic inclusiveness? ([Financial Times](#))
 - **Acting With Power.** Leading social psychologist Deborah Gruenfeld offers a fascinating look at who truly holds power. ([Penguin Random House](#))
 - **Stay Motivated When Feedback Is Scarce.** This thoughtful article by Columbia Business School Executive Education Women in Leadership instructor Deborah Grayson Riegel is a great reminder that all of us need feedback. ([Harvard Business Review](#))
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Upcoming Events

July 7-29: [Women in Leadership](#) (Virtual)

The latest iteration of this Columbia Business School program will take place in a live, virtual setting. Focused on women's advancement, it will provide participants with the knowledge, skills, tools, and real-time problem-solving needed to further the advancement of women in leadership roles. Take a look at the agenda [here](#).

July 9: [Wharton Business Radio](#) (Virtual)

Tune in to "Work and Life" on Wharton Business Radio for my conversation with Professor Stew Friedman about navigating inflection points in your own life.

July 10: [Fireside Chat With Chris Fussell](#) (Virtual)

Protests in the streets, against the backdrop of a deadly pandemic with political upheaval the world over. What kind of leadership should we look to under such

complex and highly uncertain conditions? I'm grateful to be speaking with Chris Fussell of the McChrystal Group, who together with Stan McChrystal transformed the culture in the Joint Special Operations Command to distributed, not hierarchical, leadership with a network form of governance. What Chris learned in highly deadly military situations are essential insights for all of us today.

July 17: [Fireside Chat With Whitney Johnson](#) (Virtual)

Having a great strategy is one thing (and that's hard). Having a great team that can go faster, grow in their roles, and take on the challenges of disrupting themselves is quite another (and even harder!). I'm thrilled that Whitney Johnson, author of *Build an A Team* and *Disrupt Yourself*, world famous speaker and consultant, and CEO of boutique consultancy WLJ Advisors will be joining me for a Friday Fireside Chat!

July 24: [Fireside Chat With Peter Georgescu](#) (Virtual)

In his book *Capitalists, Arise! End Economic Inequality, Grow the Middle Class, Heal the Nation*, Peter Georgescu begs for capitalists to change a system he maintains is committing "slow suicide." Peter arrived in the United States a penniless refugee from Romania and rose to become the CEO of legendary advertising company Young & Rubicam. But today, he argues, stories like his would be well-nigh impossible. His remedies for fixing capitalism are not only practical, but make the point that capitalists can only do well in a society that is likewise strong and healthy. As the crisis we face now is leading to questions about every aspect of our economy and democracy, this is an essential conversation.

August 10 - December 11: [Digital Business Leadership Program](#) (Virtual)

I'll be teaching in a program Columbia runs in collaboration with Eruditis Executive Education. It helps leaders realize their digital ambitions in a multi-module program that runs over six months. My colleague David Rogers directs the program. We're going virtual this time—let us know if you might have an interest in future runs. You can find more information about it at the [course website](#).

August 17-20: [AmCham Brasil, International Digital Program](#) (Virtual)

I'm looking forward to working with the American Chamber of Commerce in Brazil, on their first-ever digital mission. As we are unable to travel to visit companies, we're going to do a blend of immersive classroom learning and facilitated company virtual visits during this program in August. More to come as the program develops! In the meantime, give your Portuguese a spin and visit their [website](#).

Interested in having Rita offer a virtual workshop, webinar, or keynote?

[Learn more](#)

In the Press

- Coronavirus Has Ushered in a New Age of Zoom-Based Nepotism ([Wired](#))
 - Common Understanding About Business Efficiency Was a Casualty of the Pandemic ([Dialogue](#))
 - Time for a New Social Contract ([Montrose Journal](#))
 - Navigating High Uncertainty Environments ([The Melting Pot Podcast](#))
 - Design the Work You Love ([Thinkers50](#))
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Where there is uncertainty, there is also opportunity.



Here's to your next advantage! - Rita

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