

Smarter Innovation: Four disciplines of a project team: Innovation DNA (*Abstract*)

Editor's note: In the "Four disciplines of a project team," we see how good objectives- setting, credible structures, respect for team members' constraints, and learning, taken together, can promote innovation by helping us to channel creativity, offer respect, broaden perspective, and empathize.

-- Katrina Pugh, Columbia University

Project teams are part of organizational life, representing trillions of dollars of labor hours per year in the US.

Most of us associate project teams with antiseptic routine, devoid of creativity. Yet, teamwork can be a font of creativity. When I coach teams I use a model of four disciplines. These are include innovation-driving microprocesses, like sense-making, experimentation, empathy, and diversity.

Discipline 1: Shared Objectives are commonly understood to be the product of the team collaboration. Objectives-setting can be an innovation source. Teams can step out of delivery mode into discovery mode. Processes like decision matrices, "even swaps," brainstorming and knowledge jams can be intensely creative.

Discipline 2: Structures are the agreed- upon processes and rituals of the team. Structure go beyond schedules, risk matrices, and status meetings. Also included should be structures for conversation.¹ In *Sharing Hidden Know-How*, we explore three conversation dimensions: "posture of openness" (deep listening), "pursuit of diversity" (welcoming cognitive and heuristic differences), and "practices of dialogue" (combining one's sense of truth, with a readiness to suspend and listen). Such structures welcome the unconventional and embolden the curious.

Discipline 3: Individual Learning incorporates the learning goals of the individuals on the team, such as a

¹ Pugh, K., *Sharing Hidden Know-How: How Managers Solve Thorny Problems with the Knowledge Jam*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2011.

desire to learn facilitation or analytics. Team members feeling safe among trusted learning partners turn their energy more readily outward. They focus less on local task completion than on impact in a broader context.

Discipline 4: Care is the agreed- upon means of supporting each other, as physical and personal constraints come into play, such as the parental or caretaker duties of a team member. Care can incite creativity of the carer and the cared for: Stepping out of oneself and considering others' limitations can lead to creative solutions. Thought free of embarrassment or perpetual struggle can open space for new ideas.

Discipline	Helps Innovation Dimension	Mechanism
Share Objectives	Bridging, Social Integration	Forces creative integration within the constraints of the organization
Structures	All (Bridging, Social Integration, Capabilities Validation, Mkt and industry assessment, Commercialization)	Enforces rhythm, credibility and practice and can allow for sense-making, inclusion and respect
Individual Learning	Bridging, Capabilities Validation, Market, Commercialization	Helps individuals self- assess and team to step outside of silos
Care	Bridging	Allows unfettered imagining; builds trust, empathy

Disciplines contribute to innovation. The trick is to see them not as a formula but a higher purpose.

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