



Collaboration: Driving force behind diverse high-performance teams with multiple identities

■ Britta Posner

Abstract

Building diverse high-performing teams, in which everyone is working at their best, is an art. The good news is that this artform can be learnt. To harness the power of diversity and multiple identities in teams, we need to equip leaders with tools to bring out the differences, while uniting people around a common ground. A col-

laborative working culture, rooted in deep trust, is a key tool in creating impactful, diverse high-performance teams which harness the benefits of multiple identities.

In this article we take a first look at how leaders can utilize the power of collaboration within their team and across the entire organization.

Building diverse teams is difficult by itself, let alone diverse, high-performance teams, in which multiple identities come into their own. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, diversity is "(...) many different types of things or people being included in something (...)". What we classify as "different" has evolved over the past years to not only include for example differences in gender, phenotype, culture, social background and ability, but also neurodiversity.

Neurodiversity in everyday life

As the mother of a wonderful child with ADHD I have a front row seat in understanding neurodiversity. Bearing witness to how people with this condition often have a hard time fitting into the allocated societal mold, it is fascinating to see how they come into their own when providing unusual solutions, thinking outside the proverbial box and even keeping the overview in a potentially overstimulating environment.

Diversity in teams

While "different" is a critical component of high-performing teams, "different" is also difficult to manage and often expressed as "I employed a diverse team, but it's not working". That is because diverse teams can be more complex than others, bringing not just one, but two dimensions of "being different" together: diversity and multiple identities.

According to Carl F. Graumann, multiple identities result "from the many ways a person has been successfully identified with or by their environment". A key question in the context of creating a high-performing team is, how individuals know which identity delivers the most valuable output. Which identity should come to the surface in a particular moment and how does this influence the team's diversity?

Leading a diverse team

The people we work with are often team leads, and therefore responsible for creating an inclusive atmosphere in which diversity and multiple identities can flourish for the benefit of the overall output. But how is this even possible if the team members themselves are not even aware of the diverse forces at play? In our experience it all starts with raising self-awareness, as you can only lead others if you know how to lead yourself. What's more, creating a collaborative organizational culture lays the perfect ground for teams to grow together and perform at their best - because collaboration reduces complexity.

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While “being different” is a critical component of high-performance teams, identifying a diverse set of individual strengths is only the first step to success. It is the common ground underneath that layer of diversity which allows each member of a team to flourish. Once leaders have created greater awareness for the multiple identities and diversity at play in a team, they manage to create respect within that very team by allowing all team members to understand and appreciate how the diversity of their peers contributes to the entire

team's success. This is the perfect point for leaders to move from the perspective of being different into one of commonality by establishing a culture of collaboration.

Collaboration as an approach to integrate diversity

Over the past years The Collaboration Practice has identified several behavioral facets crucial to enable collaboration and to drive teams towards becoming high-performance teams. Having a joint set of values and a joint purpose are key parts of this equation. No matter how diverse your team is, shared (and lived) values and purpose will always be the guiding star leading the team towards the previously agreed goal(s). And this is something leaders can proactively foster, design and hone together with their team. But a collaborative working culture enabling teams to become high-performance teams goes much beyond that. In addition to value-driven and purpose-driven behaviors, trust is also a key ingredient. And by this I don't mean task-driven trust. I'm talking about the deep trust that allows people to be vulnerable, so that they can grow to be more deliberate on how to utilize the team diversity and potential of the multiple identities for the benefit of the organization.

Trust, transparency and continuous learning are keys

Deep trust, common values and a joint purpose form the core of any collaboration. They help teams to reduce complexity by focusing on the required output and the role each and every team member plays in delivering that output in a committed and accountable manner. Yet, there is still more to collaboration as it becomes porous across teams and the organization. In our experience, successful collaboration in high-per-

forming teams requires transparency, a certain communication maturity of the organization and an internal as well as a continuous learning mindset within and beyond the organization. Crucially, collaboration is not just a driving force behind diverse high-performing teams in which multiple identities are utilized with deliberation, but a turbo charger for innovation within every organization. ■



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