

IF SUPERSTARS BRING A BIT OF CONFLICT TO THE SITUATION, THE RESULT MAY WELL BE ADDED CREATIVITY AND A PERFORMANCE BOOST

## HOT TOPIC

### Can Disharmony Build a Better Team?



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"There is no 'I' in team!" they say. But basketball superstar Michael Jordan once said: "There is an 'I' in win." What's his point? Jordan is suggesting that someone as expert as him at a task shouldn't always be subordinated to the team. Rather, it's the team's job to support his talents so that they shine to their brightest.

Sports metaphors abound in the workplace. We talk about "heavy hitters" and ask teammates to "step up to the plate." But, the real world of teamwork is dominated by the quest for

cooperation, perhaps at the cost of needed friction. And that, according to Cambridge scholar Mark de Rond, is a potential

performance problem. "When teams work well," du Rond says, "it is because, not in spite, of individual differences."

Those in favor of du Rond's views are likely to argue that even if superstars bring a bit of conflict to the situation, the result may well be added creativity and a performance boost. Instead of trying to make everyone happy, perhaps it's time for managers and team leaders to accept that disharmony can be functional. A bit of team tension may be a price worth paying for high performance. Those worried about du Rond's views might say there's a fine line between a superstar's real performance contribution and collateral damage or negative impact caused by personality and temperament clashes. And, that line is a hard one to spot and to manage.

#### HOW ABOUT IT?

Given what we know about teams and your personal experiences with them, should we be finding ways to accommodate the superstar on a team . . . or avoid them?

discarded by simple lack of response rather than by critical evaluation. In *decision by authority rule*, the leader, manager, committee head, or some other authority figure makes a decision for the team. Although this is time-efficient, the quality of the decision depends on whether the authority figure has the necessary information. Its implementation depends on how well other team members accept the top-down approach. In *decision by minority rule*, two or three people dominate by "railroading" the team into a decision. How often have you heard: "Does anyone object? Okay, let's go ahead with it."

#### Keys to Successful Consensus Decisions

- Don't argue blindly; consider others' reactions to your points.
- Don't change your mind just to reach quick agreement.
- Avoid conflict reduction by voting, coin tossing, bargaining.
- Keep everyone involved in the decision process.
- Allow disagreements to surface so that things can be deliberated.
- Don't focus on winning versus losing; seek acceptable alternatives.
- Discuss assumptions, listen carefully, and encourage inputs by all.

**Consensus** is reached when all parties believe they have had their say and been listened to, and they agree to support the group's final decision.

One of the most common ways teams make decisions, especially when early signs of disagreement arise, is *decision by majority rule*. Although consistent with democratic methods, it is often used without awareness of potential downsides. When votes are taken, some people will be "winners" and others will be "losers." In all likelihood, you've been on the losing side at times. How did it feel? If you're like me, it may have made you feel left out, unenthusiastic about supporting the majority decision, and even hoping for a future chance to win.

Teams are often encouraged to try for *decision by consensus*. This is where full discussion leads to most members favoring one alternative, with the other members agreeing to support it. Even those opposed to the decision know that the

others listened to their concerns. Consensus doesn't require unanimity, but it does require that team members be able to argue, debate, and engage in reasonable conflict, while still listening to and getting along with one another.<sup>48</sup>

A *decision by unanimity* means all team members agree on the course of action to take. This is the ideal state of affairs, but it is also very difficult to reach. One of the reasons that teams sometimes turn to authority decisions, majority voting, or even minority decisions is the difficulty of managing team processes to achieve consensus or unanimity.