



# TeamCaring

## Prevention and Construction

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An ever-increasing number of managers are realizing that the effective management of any team requires a regular and collective 'step back' exercise. Maintaining the health of a team is called TeamCaring.

A general overview.

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### **TeamCaring: a positive necessity**

The demands of an intensive, round the clock workload can lead to teams getting stuck and breaking down. Try to picture a car without regular servicing or a plant without pruning and weed control! TeamCaring is for the team, what cares are for the plants and servicing for the car. needs Without it the smooth functioning of the team is put at risk and, little by little, performance will suffer.

### **Understanding TeamCaring:**

TeamCaring creates an occasion to step back and gain greater insights. It also promotes opportunities for dialogue, collective proactivity and a deeper mutual awareness of the team, for the team and by the team. TeamCaring caters for this logical, normal and healthy need. Indeed, it is essential for a team (and their manager) to exchange regularly in a secure, controlled environment, making time to take stock of the situation and thereby increasing professional dynamism. TeamCaring should be differentiated from training or pedagogic activities (even if these

dimensions may be touched upon in the process); it does not replace these tools but supplements them.

### **Goals of TeamCaring**

TeamCaring aims to re-enforce and stimulate the dynamics of the well-being of the team and its functionality. In other words, it seeks to reap the benefits of past experience to optimize the present and collectively build a more productive future. The team must therefore strive to:

- anchor and develop together its current collaboration, recognizing assets and successes, thus to "capitalize on the achievements".
- detect 'grains of sand' that may be clogging up the smooth workings of the team.
- realistically and effectively address and transform these "details" which may not have not been dealt with before but need attention.
- consider the future and define tangible and stimulating objectives.

Note that a 'healthy' team will find it rather easy to learn from the past and evaluate the

present, and thereby to anticipate the future. The magnitude of the results and the ease with which they are obtained is all the more dynamic, both from an operational, relational and strategic point of view.

### **Issues addressed by TeamCaring**

First of all, TeamCaring offers team members a substantial amount of time to explore the "smaller" issues that are often neglected on a daily basis. Frequently ongoing tasks and projects do not leave time to focus on these elements. Thus, even if it's for just two days a year, a TeamCaring session may provide the only opportunity to address these unresolved issues. In fact, the variety of themes to be considered is often much more diversified than one would expect. By reviewing the various significant moments of the recent past, or by anticipating certain future situations, teams express themselves, dialogue and reflect - within the limits of their powers and prerogatives - on aspects of their work that they need to conserve, to develop and/or to transform.

In practice, depending on circumstances, the team should collectively examine a whole range of issues, eg;

- the purpose and direction of the service (department, etc.)
- the roles and responsibilities of each
- team meetings
- the procedures
- the customer relationship
- the relationship with partners
- interpersonal relationships, etc.

This stock taking activity enhances the well-being of the team. Through this process the team can address any issues that may potentially lead to improvements and upon which it can act autonomously.

### Accompanying TeamCaring

The way we perceive the team and its members plays a key role. As the psychologist Carl Rogers would say the team has a built in tendency to re-think itself, to positively update its self-image, according to the internal and external conditions of the moment. Let us keep in mind this tendency (which in fact characterizes all living organisms) and the positivity that it engenders. In consequence, when properly supported, the team will dialogue according to its needs and will seek to improve the present situation and its future perspectives.

For a successful collaboration to emerge the team is accompanied by a facilitator whose role is to:

- *install a clear and supportive framework*: the roles and functions of the various team members (including the manager) determine the possible fields of action and decision making. They define the limits and in particular the prerogatives. This framework makes it possible to anticipate any subsequent developments: the team benefits from its own margin of maneuver which is much broader than that of its workaday experience. This stimulates a greater implication and mobilization of the team, leading to wider and more productive insights. Individual members can contribute to resolving issues and thereby the team becomes a vital resource for solving its own problems.
- *anchor the relational climate*: the facilitator accompanies the dialogue and the questioning without judgment or presupposition, and without personal goals or special decision-making powers. They ensure that everyone has the opportunity to contribute, and that a greater diversity of opinion is welcomed and validated leading to a constructive team spirit and a positive search for consensus. Thus, the facilitator prepares the ground for the emergence of a 'collective intelligence' which will promote a more creative and effective collaboration.

- *apply 'dynamic techniques'*: to accompany this process the facilitator can employ J.-L. Moreno's methodology (*Action Methods*) to great advantage; this approach is based on the principle of "instead of talking, showing (demonstrating)!" In successive phases, the facilitator will develop an interactive, playful and dynamic space dedicated to positive exchange. A space in which the actions of the team will explore and seek to address unresolved issues. Through expressing and experimenting, the team as a whole also demonstrates attitudes and ways of doing things that can respond effectively to its self-questioning. These are all ways to develop new, realistic and effective options, to evaluate them and to apply the ones that the team deems most appropriate.

### TeamCaring Results

To begin with, a multiplicity of different approaches emphasizes the complexity of an issue. However, it becomes clear that the pooling of intelligence can solve problems in surprising ways, and sometimes in an unexpected manner! Indeed, new ideas emerge as a result of creative interactions. Thus, a diversity of views can generate an enriched creativity. Accompanied effectively, the team, liberated and stimulated by this opportunity, will avoid dispersal and fragmentation. More so, it will solve the problems identified, consolidate its own operations and sometimes even innovate. Exploiting this creativity for its own constructive orientation will enable the team to (e.g.):

- research, find, refine and develop responses to its problems
- renew its guidelines (within its own framework)
- take the opportunity to reaffirm if necessary, its best practices
- reinvigorate weekly meetings
- set up think tanks and work groups
- establish a realistic and effective action plan etc.

The collaboration during a TeamCaring session and the involvement of everyone in the collective process brings further results, not necessarily material, but always very noticeable as this positive experience is based on the satisfaction of many of the fundamental needs of the team members. This results in an increased sense of coherence, cohesion, belonging, achievement.

All powerful factors in the growth and performance of a company. Thus, the mobilization effected by TeamCaring can offer an opportunity for "spring cleaning" and enhanced productivity. It will also, above all, revive the motivation of each and every member of the team.

### TeamCaring for a day, TeamCaring forever!

As has been demonstrated, TeamCaring is a precious moment of dialogue. Such an exercise in sharing should be renewed throughout the year. It would be a pity to limit it to just two annual "days off". Really taking care of a team requires frequent periods of collective reflection (during meetings for example). Hence the ubiquitous need to take an attentive and positive look at the way the team evolves along with the importance of encouraging collective intelligence on an active and frequent basis.

Unfortunately, too few managers regularly provide such space for creative interaction. All the more reason to give even a team that is performing well more time for introspection. This has both a preventive and constructive effect. It acts as a kind of think tank through action and interaction around the theme of "Thinking about our team and how it works".

But what about when a team is not performing well, when it is unstable and there are significant tensions? A reflective step back is all the more necessary. In this case however, TeamCaring is not the appropriate tool. A better option would be TeamBuilding. Through conflict management, this method aims to transform these tensions before they explode ... and before having to embark upon a full-scale team mediation.

So many good reasons - if needed - to be proactive in capitalizing on achievements and maintaining the good health of the team!

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