



## **ABILITY TO COOPERATE IN TEAM**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Social and practical relevance of the specific topic addressed**

Soft skills are personality traits and interpersonal skills that characterise someone's professional behaviour and how they relate to others. In the workplace, soft skills are considered to complement “hard skills”, which refer to someone's knowledge and concrete abilities. A well-functioning team consists of several individuals whose motivation, underlying interaction and communication are essential for a good team presentation. Individual and joint consciousness exercises contribute to the development of a strong team.

#### **1.2 Need of assessment**

The relationships among the team members themselves are of great importance regarding the team's functioning, both in the short and the long run. Well-cared-for relationships within the team ensure the development and amelioration of a sense of well-being and safety. Via this process (temporary) loss of team members and, consequently, the team's loss can be minimised as much as possible. The exercises mentioned above are intended to let the team members gain experience with their self-consciousness.

#### **1.3 Main goals and learning outcomes**

The main goals when teaching students softskills in teams are:

- Providing knowledge about what is important when forming a team
- Ensuring awareness of everyone's individual patterns and the influence on mutual dynamics
- Outlining the necessities for viable and durable cooperation

### **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES**

#### **2.1 Specific points of attention**

In a well-functioning team, attention must be paid to ethical awareness in different fields, such as durability, social responsibility, and life quality. Moreover, one must take a look into the personality characteristics of all team members. Research has shown that a team needs more than just the capacities of individual members. Therefore, a well-composed team is derived from optimising all skills,

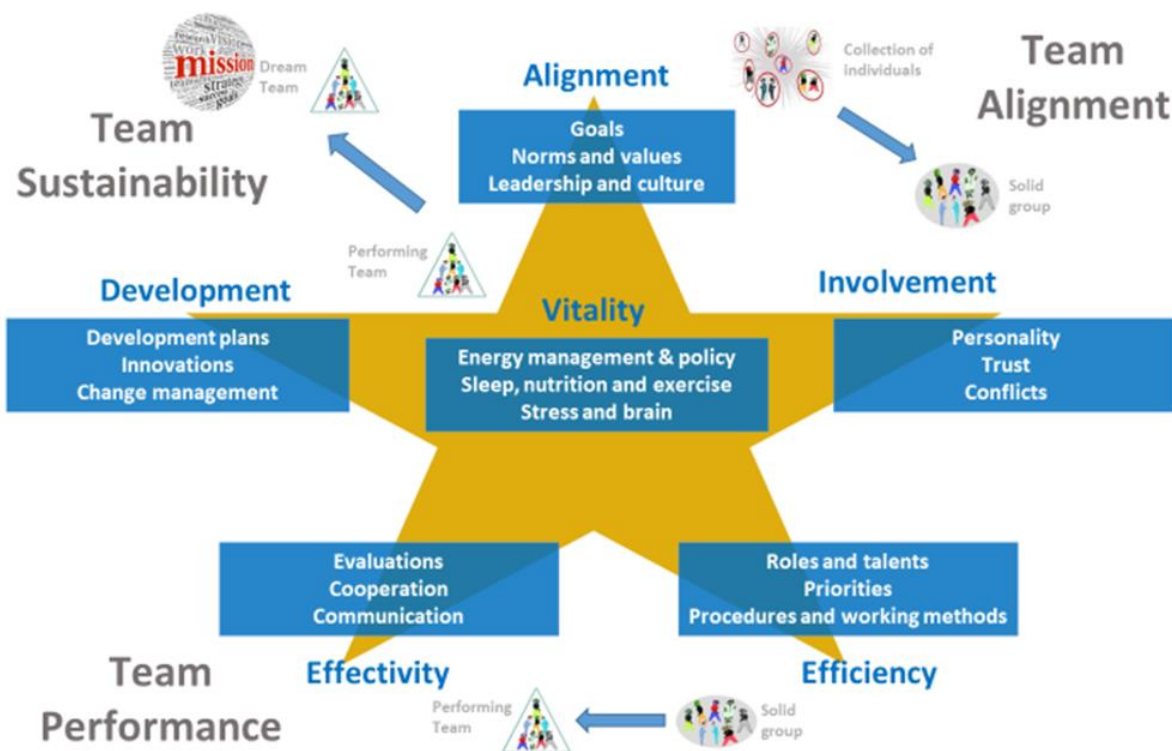
knowledge and personal drivers per team member according to the below mentioned Teamstar model (Van Zwieten & Smit, 2019).

The Teamstar model consists of three main elements:

- Bringing unrelated individuals to a solid group; alignment and involvement; Team Alignment.
- The optimal level of functioning as a team; efficiency and effectivity; Team Sustainability.
- Setting the basis for a sustainable dream team; development and vitality; Team Performance.

The three main elements of Teamstar cannot be seen as phases that a team goes through, like with Tuckman's development phases. It is a vision to continuously monitor and evaluate a team in order to continue the growth.

There will be exercises based on these three main elements. Team Alignment, Team Sustainability and Team Performance.



Teamstar – Van Zwieten & Smit 2019

## ALIGNMENT

**Goals**  
**Norms and values**  
**Leadership and culture**

How do we get some loose individuals to act as a team? In sports, we see this in its most extreme form because the results are immediately visible. How is it possible that a team that did not perform well under one coach suddenly wins everything when the coach is changed?

Even with the same players! And this is no different in business, but the effect is often only visible on the slightly longer term. So, it is not the level of the team members. It is about the mindset in which

participants work together to achieve their goals. We distinguish two main themes; Alignment and Involvement.

On the one hand, the goal must be clear and appealing. If we do not know where we are going, we will never get there. But it also is demanding good leadership. Does the leader know how to inspire and motivate people to go for these goals? Because we are speaking of a team, this goes beyond just the interests and motivation of the individual. It is precisely the willingness to subord individual interests to the team interest that requires a culture of trust based on conformity of common values and norms. Understanding the personality of the team members helps to inspire and motivate them. If the culture is such that open feedback can be given and conflicts have a constructive character in the cooperation, the team will be able to achieve synergy.

Norms and values are personal, individual beliefs concerning that thing which is most important to ourselves as individuals. Your values form a belief system regarding right or wrong, good or evil.

Your values have an enormous impact on the way you live your life. It affects your choice of clothing, the type of car you drive in, where you live, whom you marry, how you raise your children and even how well you interact with people in a professional setting. Values form the basis for our most important life decisions. They are the most critical factor in understanding and predicting both our behaviour as well as others. The creation of our values begins at a young age. From the moment you are born and onwards, you pick up values from various people. Parents raise us from value systems. Alternate sources of values could be grandparents, at a friend's home, school or university, church, culture or media. The development of values does not limit itself to our youth but develops over our lives. One example could be work. To conform to certain people's demands and to make promotion, we tend to assimilate to some values. We do, however, not always feel as comfortable about this.

It is helpful to understand your values as they steer your behaviour. For most people, values are subconscious. People might not know why they acted a certain way; they feel it is the right thing to do. This can be explained as values are stored in our subconsciousness. And as values are not actively present and can be conflicting, conflicts can quickly emerge on the work floor. Values are one of the most important assets in understanding someone's character, or even your own, for that matter.

Values could be Freedom, love, visibility, security, honesty, clarity, creativity, inspiration, safety, respect, connectedness, health, development and trust. Some values are towards values, while others are away from values. Some might even conflict. It defines who you are through the most important things your family system gave you and the things you have experienced.

According to cell biologist Bruce Lipton, all of our wishes and desires can be found in our consciousness and our "programming" in our subconsciousness. This programming of our most essential and personal value hierarchy originates from our first seven years of life. During this period, you subconsciously learn from your parents. And this makes us all unique with all our unique values and belief systems.

Beliefs originate from experiences or situations that we have drawn a conclusion of and are linked to certain values. Our beliefs are in our thinking and our values in our feelings. Beliefs can be found in the neocortex while values are located in the limbic brain. We have a whole range of beliefs that are linked to one particular value.

If a value changes, it impacts more than just a belief. If, for example, your health is an important value to you, there are a handful of beliefs that steer your behaviour:

- You have to eat fruit and vegetables every day
- You have to drink 2 litres of water every day
- Smoking and alcohol are bad for you
- Walking is good for you
- Sitting all day is not good for you
- Sports are not fun
- Walking in nature is fun

### **Away from values**

Imagine that you experienced a strong feeling of dependence as a child, and it was very unpleasant as you experienced little freedom and were frequently asked to help with chores while you would have preferred to play with your friends. As an infant, you were dependent on your parents for food, shelter and love, and thus you had no choice but to do what they impeded you to do. Do you recognise this? Because then independence might be a significant value to you. Because this feeling originates from a sense of dependence that is much stronger than a feeling of independence, it is an away from value. "Away from" implies, you do not want to feel dependent anymore. The motivation, therefore, comes from refraining from dependence.

### **Towards values**

Imagine that your health is essential to you, and you have no negative experiences concerning illness or unhealthiness. In this scenario, the value and motivation could be "towards". You then have a towards value to strive for good health.

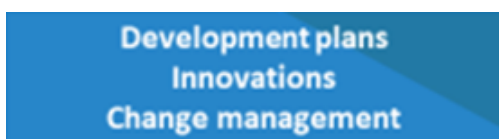
Values that are mostly "towards" give energy, and vital substances (neurotransmitters such as dopamine, oxytocin, melatonin, serotonin and endorphins) are produced. All of these neurotransmitters are required to feel happy. They are anti-stress substances because of the proven positive effect on mood and health.

For example, from a person's youth and experiences, the away from the value of visibility arose. This person wanted to be invisible as a small child. Due to some determined situations and experiences, we might encounter something we dislike and develop a strong away from value in response. This person disliked visibility and invisibility as its counterpart.

**Alignment: Exercise A – Values I** (Groupwork)

**Alignment: Exercise B – Values II** (Groupwork)

## **DEVELOPMENT**



Working with Personal Development Plans (PDP) and Team Development Plans (TDP) is not new, but has been given a different interpretation. It is not primarily about the direct functioning and competences that are discussed periodically,

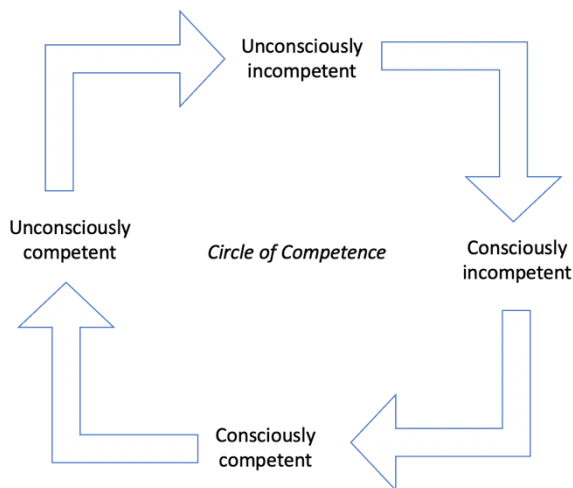
but is rather a continuous process of monitoring the objectives of growth, development and vitality.

Especially from a long-term perspective, it is important that team members continue to interact openly and respectfully with each other. If you are only a team for a day or a week, you can endure some irritations. However, if the team is here to stay for a longer term, a respectful cooperation where there can be room for improvement and personal growth is desirable (or necessary).

The literal definition of “feedback” is as follows: looking back and reflecting on past actions. It is important to note that feedback is not a critique, but it indicates the effects of one’s behaviour via your senses explicitly.

If you criticise someone, your interlocutor’s behaviour probably affects you (negatively). Therefore, you do not solely want to make them conscient of their behaviour, but even change it. In this case, it is challenging also to give yourself feedback on your role and actions.

If it is your task to help the other person develop themselves, giving feedback is the best way to provide something to someone else that makes their qualities, even more, stand out and more effectively implemented. Without feedback, we would not even learn or develop because we would not know whether we would have learned anything.



Through feedback, you will become conscient of the circle of competence: from unconsciously incompetent, to consciously incompetent, to consciously competent, and finally to unconsciously competent. Besides, feedback may be used to define clear boundaries for yourself and positively make someone conscient of their behaviour and its effects on you. When giving feedback, it is essential to compliment others on their input instead of taking intellect as the basis. Thus, one should not say: “Oh, how I marvel at your idea” or, “I think you are brilliant”, but instead: “I have seen that you have been working very intensively”,

or: “I noticed that you have thought about this matter in great detail”.

As a consequence, the focus will turn to the learning process itself, and this change will stimulate others to see “mistakes” as an opportunity to learn.

### **Rules for feedback**

- You speak neutrally and without any prejudice or other judgment;
- You give feedback in the ‘I’-form;
- You specifically name what you perceive, and with which senses you do so;
- You give feedback instantaneously, preferably within no more than five minutes;
- Your feedback is short and concise, and you do not expand;
- You have a positive intention while giving your feedback;
- Feedback is received without comment or interruption.

## Sandwich Feedback



- Give compliments and emphasise on the thing you thought someone did well;
- Indicate which matters you think need extra attention;
- Finish with a positive summary.

## Compliments

In addition to giving careful (sandwich) feedback on the things that could be ameliorated, it can also be very stimulating and motivating for the recipient to receive a compliment. Complimenting can increase self-confidence and give a positive feeling.

There is, however, also a downside to this. Imagine you have a co-team member who has been raised in a family, where it was usual to criticise one another on absolutely everything, and in which attention would often be negative. If you and others start giving compliments to said individual, this could work counterproductive.

Suppose you grew up in a "refrigerator" (the negative family), and suddenly someone raised in a "heater" (the cheerful family) starts complimenting you. In that case, this could be thought of as painful and insufferable.

When praising those coming from the refrigerator, it might be best to start off using a less favourable compliment, followed by something more positive. Reciprocally, it could be the case that someone not used to critiques is very wary of them and does not know how to cope with these.

Let's say you have two different team members, and you give them the same compliment, being that you notice that they are very eager to learn. It may very well happen that one runs away because they realised that that is a bad trait, while another team member feels motivated because he or she has known that it is something extraordinary.

**Development: Exercise C – Compliments Round I** (Groupwork)

**Development: Exercise D – Compliments Round II** (Groupwork)

## VITALITY

Energy management & policy  
Sleep, nutrition and exercise  
Stress and brain

After a long period in which companies only focussed on short-term (financial) results, there has been a change in thinking patterns. The first reason was the publication of major fraud cases and later the banking crisis. This has led to

a call for ethical awareness and the control of excesses in rewards.

In addition, the mentality about quality of life is also different. The increasing number of people with burnouts, structural stress, sleep problems and poor health (obesity, diabetes), alongside the increasing ageing of people accompanied by their necessary need for care, has made people realise that it is not only about the sustainability of companies but also about the sustainability of the people in them.



A third factor is the climate debate and the call for corporate social responsibility. Under pressure of the younger generation and the studies on problems in the (near) future that can no longer be denied, thinking in sustainability and social accountability for companies has become a reality.

The final phase therefore forces a company to implement innovations and changes to meet the requirements of our time. This implies adjusting the way of doing business to meet the demands of sustainability and climate, as well as better handling of the people in the organisation.

## INVOLVEMENT



We all observe, and we all do this in our own way. If the way team members perceive and observe is clear, they can very effectively use each other's sensory preferences and qualities in order to strengthen the performance of the team

as a whole.

### **Our perception is always subjective**

Your perception is your observation of the world and not the experience itself. Each person has their own unique way of observing and that fact makes observations seem personally objective for someone, but in relation to the bigger picture are by definition subjective.

In 1956, American psychologist George A. Miller published his famous scientific treatise *The Magical Number Seven, Plus or Minus Two* (the law of  $7 +$  or  $- 2$ ) in 1956. Hereby, Miller showed that our conscious memory can only store between five and nine information units at a time.

As individuals, we perceive our lives, concerning our social background and personal history in life, colour our perception. By learning to perceive purely, regardless of our interpretation, our consciousness will grow, and we will be able to enlarge our sensory-perceptual capacities. The challenge is thus to observe without any subjectivity.

Thereafter, he published his Miller's Second Law<sup>3</sup>:

"If you want to understand what someone else implies, you first have to believe that what the other person is telling is true and then wonder of which this is the truth."

Miller's second law insinuates that one ought to listen to someone's story before judging the other's opinion and narrative. This aims to understand the other individual, independent of and without the way we perceive the spoken words themselves.

Of course, this does not mean that only the reality of the other person is applicable. This law aims to listen better to the other person, and that this is the prime condition for equal communication.

The way we look at the world determines our reality. Suppose you come across someone who is very fat; then you can think that someone looks unhealthy. On the contrary, someone else can find that person very attractive.

If you think a team member of yours is stupid or someone you are highly annoyed with, that does not automatically say anything about that person, but it says everything about the way you perceive them. After all, the method you interpret something (i.e., through which glasses you see something and reason about it) determines your reality. Let it sink in what this means for working within a team. If every team member could take responsibility for their behaviour and dares to be open about this, then a

foundation has been laid for a powerful team. Conflicts and irritations in a team are nothing more than a signal and a perfect moment to explore where team members negatively affect each other jointly.

### **Perception via Senses**

We observe through seeing, hearing, the sense of touch, smelling and tasting. In part, this is conscious perception, but to an even greater extent, it is an unconscious process. We hardly realise the enormous amount of information we receive and process continuously every second. It is essential to realise that not everyone sees, hears, feels, smells or tastes the same, although we believe that we all look at the same thing, hear the same thing, feel the same, smell the same or taste the same.

We observe anytime, anywhere. Consciously as well as unconsciously. We cannot simply “turn off” our perceptions. Every second, an incredible number of images, sounds, feelings, smells and tastes are headed in our direction.

Our senses convert these perceptions into stimuli in our brains. Most people respond pretty adequately to these stimuli. We make a selection from the thousands of sensory experiences. And we all make a different selection. This ensures that we experience events in our way. Thus, it could be constructive that you are bothered by impressions in a team that another team member is not irritated by and therefore find it difficult to understand that you cannot function properly because of this.

People living next to a railway often hear and feel every train pass by for the first few weeks. After a while, your brain filtered this information and identified it as insignificant information. It does not come into your consciousness anymore. You can no longer hear a train running by, and you can no longer feel the vibrations. Fortunately, we get used to several things, but it is wise to make this negotiable if we do not. If all team members know how filtering and perception work, it is easier to understand each other and come to terms with each other with often only small adjustments.

### **Seeing**

The information offered in images is usually easier to process than details in words. Words are temporary. They will be gone in a minute. But it also takes a while to process images. Moreover, everyone creates their interpretation of words. Consequently, it is not implausible that these interpretations often differ between two individuals.

### **Hearing**

Some people are hypersensitive to sound. They, for instance, will hear the faucet dripping in the office kitchen. Or they hear the sound of electrical devices, such as the squeaking or buzzing of a lamp or a laptop, and that distracts them so much that they can no longer even hear what is being said to them.

### **Feeling**

Not everyone appreciates being touched as much as others (or at all indeed). A well-intended pat on the back or cuddle could be experienced as threatening or uncomfortable.

### **Tasting**

Something that tastes delicious to one person may be gross for the other. Also, it is not uncommon for people to have food allergies. What one finds (too) hot in terms of temperature, the other finds'



lukewarm'. There are many differences one may think of. It also occurs that these senses are weakened or not even present at all. One of the most common side effects of the COVID-19 virus is a loss of taste.

### **Smelling**

If one were to have a hypersensitivity to odours, it might be challenging to cope with because smells are everywhere. Putting these smells into perspective might help. The scent in the canteen is connected to the food there. It also happens that people's sense of smell is weakened or totally absent at all. Once again, this could also be a consequence of the novel coronavirus.

**Involvement: Exercise E – Perception II** (Groupwork)

**Involvement: Exercise F – Lie or actually the truth?** (Groupwork)

### **EFFECTIVITY**

When one discusses the role of a team member, there are a number of extra requirements. Effectiveness is therefore mainly about the interaction between the group members. How do we work together? In what way do we communicate? As Pentland has researched, active but efficient 'live' communication is essential for performance. A system of continuous evaluation, feedback and communication regarding this ensures a lasting growth.

In a weak team, team members say yes to a decision or new way of working to keep the peace; not because they really agree.

If you regularly avoid conflicts or serious discussions as a team, there is no room for improvement and growth. Lencioni therefore encourages teams to engage in a confrontation on a regular basis. For this you have to trust each other.

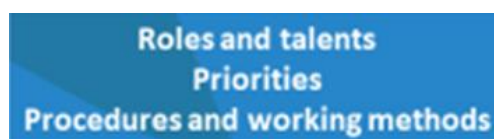
Good cooperation requires social skills as:

- Communication skills;
- Sensitivity;
- Listening skills;
- Assertiveness;
- Contact skills;
- Negotiation skills;
- Initiative.



**Effectivity: Exercise G – Changes** (Groupwork)

### **EFFICIENCY**



In order to function efficiently, all the necessary competencies must be present. It is therefore imperative the team have a clear understanding of the tasks, procedures and practices in order to know which expertise is required. Contrastingly, as

Belbin has shown, it is not just about the competencies related to the primary processes. It is also necessary to analyse on the basis of the personalities whether the team has what is needed given the task on the long run. Diversity and balance are often the most important factors. Good insight into the

procedures and working methods also ensures the efficient distribution of tasks. A well-known phenomenon is the loss of focus on the things that are most important. Therefore, thinking and working according to priorities significantly improves results.

**Efficiency: Exercise H – White Board / Flip over Back-to-Back drawing** (Groupwork)

## EXERCISE A

**Alignment: Exercise - Questioning Values I** (Groupwork, work in pairs)

Objective of the exercise:

Investigating your programming. Become aware of your subconscious drivers and what energises you or makes you tired.

Work in pairs and ask questions about each other's values. Person A asks person B, "what do you find important? And what else? Do you value other things as well? The person asking questions also writes down these values. Continue until you have discovered ten values.

If both have found ten values, you can order them based on importance to you. This means your most important value ranks as number 1 and a slightly less critical value as number 2. You continue to shuffle until you are happy with the result.

You then continue to write the individual values on separate sheets of paper, which you then place on the ground. Person A, whose values are on the floor, can stand on "10", and Person B will ask him the following questions:

Imagine that you either have.....(value on place "10") while lacking ... (value on place "9") or you have....(value on place "9") while lacking ... (value on place "10"), which would you choose?

If the value on "10" feels more important than the value on "9", these should be exchanged.

Do this for all 10 values until it feels correct for the person whose values are on the floor. You now have created a "top 10" of your value perspective with the (at the moment) most important values on top.

## EXERCISE B

**Alignment: Exercise - Questioning Values II** (Groupwork, work in pairs)

Choose the 5 most important (core) values for this complementary exercise.

Person A shall ask the following questions to person B and simultaneously write down as much as possible to preserve the answers:

Answer the following questions for each value

1. What does value..... mean to you?

2. Why is value..... important to you?  
And why is that important to you?  
And why is that important to you?
3. Why is value..... also important to you?  
And why is this important to you?  
And why is that important to you?
4. What internal idea do you have of this value?
5. What is for you the opposite of value.....?
6. Where and when did you first encounter the opposite of value.....? (discover if there is still an unprocessed negative emotion connected to this encounter).
7. For what percentage is this value steered by *towards* and for what percentage by *away from*? It may be an approximate estimate.

## EXERCISE C

### **Development: Exercise - Compliments - Round I** (Groupwork)

One person sits in front of the group and the others take turns in giving them a compliment. The recipient picks up the compliment with a 'thank you' and says nothing else. If everyone has had their turn, discuss how this exercise has been experienced.

## EXERCISE D

### **Development: Exercise - Compliments - Round II** (Groupwork)

Do you dare to hear some negative expressions about your personality as well? You will most certainly feel that they affect you in one way or another.

Note for the group: especially look out for any non-verbal signals.

What is the difference compared to the round of compliments? What is it that you see? Ask responses from both the group and the recipient.

Finish with a round of compliments!

## EXERCISE E

### **Involvement: Exercise - Perception II (Groupwork)**

Firstly, write down for yourself what you have seen, heard and felt. Then, discuss with your team members. What differences are there to be found in terms of perception? Do you see things very close to you or further away, and do you see details or the broad outlines? The same goes for hearing. Do you hear the sounds close by or do you hear the sounds further away better? What sounds did you filter out when your colleague mentioned them first? And when feeling: How do you differ in experiencing heat or cold? Do you feel things inside, such as unrest or peace, or feel only the things that are outside of you such as the chair you are sitting on or your feet in your shoes?

Discuss the differences with each other and see where adjustments are needed or where you can support each other.

## EXERCISE F

### **Involvement: Exercise - Lie or actually the truth? (Groupwork)**

Give each of the team members four pieces of paper. Task them with writing down three truths and one lie. The lie must to some extent be believable (so avoid sentences like “I drank a bottle of vodka with the Pope”). Ask each participant to read their truths and lie in a random order. Discuss the stories. Which story is true? Which is made up?

A handful of questions that brings the team closer together:

- How often do you not say what you actually think or feel?
- How often do you hold back the truth?
- What does it mean to you when somebody does not tell the truth, e.g., a colleague about what he thinks of you?
  - Is it still lying if you only slightly exaggerate the truth?
  - What is your belief about this?

Trust is priority number one in a strong and close team!

## EXERCISE G

### **Effectivity: Exercise – Changes (Groupwork)**

Group A and Group B will situate themselves on opposite sides and look at each other. Then, Group A turns around. Members of Group B will thereafter change three things about their appearance. Group A turns around again and evaluates what changes it notices.

## EXERCISE H

### **Efficiency: Exercise - White Board/Flip over Back-to-Back drawing (Groupwork)**

The team will be divided into two or three groups.

Two individuals will walk up to the whiteboard or flipchart while the other team members stand opposite of them on the other side of the room. One person gets blindfolded (this is the one who is going to draw). The person without a blindfold will be shown a drawing by the people on the other side of the room that should appear on the board. The person without a blindfold must give directions to the person who is actually going to draw. However, nobody is allowed to say what really needs to be drawn.

The objective of this exercise is to have people working together in a team. They are to provide hints such as “move up now” and “a little bit to the right”.

It is easier to choose fairly simple drawings, for example the shape of a house or a fruit such as an apple. Blindfolded drawing is much harder than you think.

This means going out of your comfort zone and daring to let go of others’ opinions on your drawings.

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