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The 'I's in team:: The importance of individual members to team success[☆]

Kyle J. Emich, Thomas A. Wright

"There were eleven votes for guilty. It's not so easy for me to raise my hand and send a boy off to die without talking about it first."

Juror 8 (Henry Fonda), in the movie "12 Angry Men"

Nowhere is the importance of an 'I' in a group or team setting more apparent than in the highly acclaimed movie, "12 Angry Men" starring Henry Fonda, Lee J. Cobb and a host of distinguished supporting actors. Set in a New York City courthouse, the drama involves the case of a teenage boy accused of stabbing his father to death. If convicted, he will be sentenced to death. As the movie unfolds, the viewer becomes acutely aware that the jurors have already decided without discussion that the accused is guilty as charged...all, that is, except for juror 8 (Henry Fonda), the only "not guilty" vote in the initial tally. The rest of the movie highlights how one "I" in this particular group, through reason and persuasive argument, is able to eventually convince the remaining jurors of the lack of evidence to judge the accused guilty. An explanation for *why* the group's gradual change of decision course over time and ultimate team "success" occurred can be found in a number of exciting new directions in group research and practice.

Groups comprise a necessary structural element of modern organizations since they allow for the combination of resources toward accomplishing complex tasks that no single person can achieve alone. In his 1950 industrial sociological masterpiece, *The Human Group*, George Homans mentions that the only historical continuity for humans over time in society is that of small groups. More recently, in a 2013 study involving 831 companies from across the globe, Ernst and Young confirmed that the use of groups in organizations is alive and well, reporting that employees across industries spent an average of 54% of

their day in a team setting with the highest percentage coming from China (64.8%) and the lowest from South Africa (47%). Workers in the United States spent 51.4% of their day in team settings. This trend has been partially driven by the increase in communication technology allowing firms to virtually connect employees across continents. In 2012, a poll by SHRM showed that 46% of organizations use virtual teams, including 66% of organizations based outside the United States. Scholars and practitioners alike expect this already significant percentage to continue to grow in the future.

However, despite their growing use, teams do not always perform in a manner deserving of their integral role to organizations. To investigate *why* this is, organizational researchers generally explore team effectiveness by searching for team characteristics that can either help teams perform effectively in a variety of contexts, or hinder them from doing so. This research usually operates under the assumption that team properties emerge as consensual, collective dimensions of the team itself. Part of the reason for this is because emergent group properties have been shown to relate to a variety of team processes and outcomes. For example, a host of research has found that teams who have high collective efficacy, or are more confident in their abilities to succeed, perform better across a wide range of tasks. Teams that are perceived as more psychologically safe have been found to adapt to new environments more quickly and perform better. Cohesive teams generally have higher member participation in activities and more compliance with group norms. Finally, teams are often described in terms of their overall level of satisfaction, level of competition, or commitment to the task at hand.

Yet, consider again the quote presented at the beginning of this article by the Henry Fonda character in *12 Angry Men*. This character provides an explicit example of one team member "successfully" changing the attitudes and behavior of an entire team. In this case, the jury he is a part of changes

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their verdict from a death sentence to not guilty because a sole juror has the integrity, sense of justice, persistence and courage to go against the crowd and fight for a fair deliberation. Interestingly, if you were to assess the jury at the group level, you would find that the group strongly believed in the guilt of the suspect. Based on this assessment you may falsely conclude that a jury in which 92% of the members initially believe in the guilt of the suspect is likely to send that individual to his death. It is only by exploring the pattern of individual attitudes and behavioral interactions that an observer may begin to conclude that the jury may find the suspect not guilty. Although fictional, this situation closely mirrors real life examples of single individuals courageous enough to speak out in an attempt to make larger collectives act with greater integrity.

THE CASE OF A REAL LIFE HERO: U.S. SENATOR EDMUND G. ROSS

After the tragic assassination of President Abraham Lincoln on April 14, 1865, his successor, then Vice President Andrew Johnson was left with the monumental and onerous task of undertaking Lincoln's truly humanitarian reconciliation policies with the defeated Confederacy. While a man of significant courage, Johnson was the only Southern Member of Congress to refuse to secede from the Union with his State (Tennessee), he was not nearly as dynamic and persuasive a personality as Lincoln. As a result, in the bloody aftermath of the Civil War, Johnson was continuously at odds with the Radical Republican-dominated Congress, vetoing a number of bills as not only unconstitutional, but much too harsh in their proposed treatment of the Post-War South. As a result, and for the first time in our nation's history, important legislation was passed over a President's veto, thus becoming the law of the land without President Johnson's support. It must be noted that not all of Andrew Johnson's vetoes were overturned and the congressional Radical Republicans soon realized that only the impeachment of President Johnson would provide them total victory. However, getting the two-thirds majority vote necessary for impeachment was highly problematic. More specifically, the success of their endeavor rested squarely on the vote of one man, first-term Kansas Senator, Edmund G. Ross.

That impeachment would come down to the vote of Ross was quite ironic as Ross had to date been a staunch supporter of the Radical Republican agenda, voting for all of their previous legislative measures. In addition, Ross was from Kansas, which along with Massachusetts was arguably the most anti-Johnson state in the country. Furthermore, his colleague from Kansas, Senator Samuel C. Pomeroy, was one of the most strident (and vocal) opponents of Johnson. Through all this, Ross remained tight-lipped on how he would vote on impeachment, adding further drama to an already extremely tense situation. How much interest were the impending impeachment procedures generating? Well, like any hit Broadway show, the impeachment tickets printed for admission to the Senate galleries were a hot commodity and the then fifty-four United States Senators were deluged with requests for them.

On the morning of the vote, Ross was threatened with political death by several colleagues if he dared vote for

President Andrew Johnson's acquittal. As the impeachment vote commenced, it became clear that Ross's vote was, in fact, the pivotal one. In a voice that was both strong and unmistakable, Ross voted "Not guilty" and President Johnson was acquitted. Ross paid a very heavy price for his courage. His every behavior was minutely scrutinized and he was accused of various supposed improprieties. Of course, his political career was over and when he returned to Kansas after his term was completed both he and his family were subjected to a continuous barrage of social ostracism and physical confrontation. Ross later poignantly described how he felt after his dramatic and courageous vote in noting, "...I almost literally looked down into my open grave..." Without the "happy" Hollywood ending, Ross was a real-life counterpart to the Henry Fonda character.

MODERN DAY HEROES: WHISTLEBLOWING AT ELI LILLY

As a more recent case in point of the role of "I" in Team, Robert Rudolph who, in the largest pharma whistleblowing case in United States history, went to a group of fellow sales representatives with evidence that Eli Lilly was illegally marketing the drug Zyprexa for uses that were not approved by the Food and Drug Administration, predominantly the treatment of dementia in the elderly. He was able to gather other representatives to file lawsuits against the company. The \$1.4 billion settlement from Eli Lilly included the largest criminal fine to date for an individual corporation. Rudolph, along with fellow whistleblowers Joseph Faltaous, Steven Woodward, and Jaydeen Vincente shared nearly \$79 million. Thus, unlike many whistleblowers, Rudolph received a measure of vindication. Like almost all whistleblowers, Rudolph paid a severe cost on his road to vindication. During the seven years after he raised his hand at a Lilly district sales meeting in Sacramento, California in January, 2002, Rudolph was rudely and consistently ostracized by his colleagues, resulting in his depression and ultimately forced out of his well-paying job. However, Edmund Ross and Robert Rudolph are two examples that one individual (the "I") can make a difference. Even more importantly, a growing number of executives such as Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England concur. In a recent speech to Ivey Business students at the University of Western Ontario, Carney noted that his "...Employees need a sense of broader purpose, grounded in strong connections to their clients and communities." Like Carney, industry-level data supports the idea that the leaders of many high-level professional teams believe that one team member can greatly impact team processes and performance.

IMPLICIT ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF 'I'S: FREE AGENCY IN SPORTS

The most salient example of the underlying confidence businesses have in the importance of individuals to team performance may occur in professional sports. Consider that in the 2014 NBA offseason, despite strict salary caps, teams committed just above a whopping \$600 million to the signing of

free agents from other franchises. Additionally, Major League Baseball teams spent \$2.0 billion on free agents during the 2013 offseason, slightly less than the \$2.3 billion that European soccer clubs spent on free agent players during their three month long transfer window in the summer of 2013. Again, these numbers suggest that owners and managers of some of the most specialized teams in the world operate under the implicit assumption that individual employees impact team performance, not just because they are part of a high performing team, but because of their unique individual characteristics.

Still, spending money on bringing in highly touted new employees does not always result in the anticipated improved team performance. One prominent instance of this occurred in 2004 when the New York Yankees committed \$112M to bringing Alex Rodriguez to a team that had lost the World Series the prior year. There were no major losses to the team besides starting pitcher Andy Pettite, so bringing in the superstar was seen as a way to take the next step and bring home another World Series win. Moreover, in the six years prior to the arrival of Rodriguez the Yankees had been to the World Series five times, winning three. However, in the six years after the arrival of Rodriguez the Yankees made the World Series only once, winning it in 2009. More confounding, Rodriguez did not perform poorly at the individual level. In fact, he won league Most Valuable Player in both 2005 and 2007.

Now, there could have been many reasons for this change in team performance, as Rodriguez was not the only change the Yankees made during this time period. However, we argue that one of the reasons this deal could have gone wrong was that, when making it, the Yankees overlooked two important considerations regarding how individuals can influence team performance, two considerations that organizational scholars are only beginning to investigate and understand. First, teams do not have to be viewed as holistic entities, but instead can be viewed as networks of individuals that influence each other. We refer to this view of teams as sets of interacting individuals who reciprocally influence each other as “subjective systems” to highlight the notion that each individual team member interprets themselves, each other team member, and the team as a whole, and that teammates influence each other. Second, we argue that by overlooking this, organizations often inadvertently neglect to consider how bringing individuals into a preexisting network can influence the relationships between all other parts of that collective. Anyone who has had a highly skilled and well-regarded administrative assistant replace a less skilled one (or vice-versa) will understand how one change in team personnel can influence the performance of many of its members.

Regarding our second consideration, researchers have begun to investigate how individuals’ emotions and thoughts can spillover to other team members to influence team functioning. Anyone who has had a particularly cheery coworker who brightens their day (or a dismal one who darkens it) will understand how characteristics of one team member can spill over to others. Fred Luthans and his colleagues have suggested that this leader/member spillover or “contagion” effect is particularly relevant in the better understanding of the role of psychological capital or PsyCap on a wide range of workplace topics. More specifically, PsyCap is composed of

the psychological resources of self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience. An important distinction between PsyCap and other positive psychological constructs is that PsyCap is considered to be “state-like” and open to development. As just one of many potential research questions, how does the level of optimism of a highly resilient team member positively affect the adaptation potential of the other team members? We will further explore these types of possibilities and give some insight into how viewing teams as networks of individuals, whose thoughts and emotions can spillover to others, can influence the way teams are composed in organizations. Finally, after explaining and providing evidence of this growing paradigm shift, we begin the discussion of how one (or more) team member’s strength of character can influence relationships, thoughts, and performance of her fellow teammates.

TEAMS AS NETWORKS

Viewing teams as subjective systems can help highlight the importance of each individual to the overall collective. For example, the high performance of a five-person creative marketing team is highly dependent on the information exchange among its individual members. In turn, this information exchange is dependent on the individual characteristics of those members. In other words, the *team* did not have a sudden insight. Bob really came up with an initial idea and shared it with Mary because he trusted her. Mary then built upon Bob’s initial idea before the two presented it to the other three members of the team, who then had a series of argumentative conversations until the team settled on an idea to pitch to their client.

However, normatively, this team would simply be described as high performing, open, and creative, and the individual roles that Bob, Mary, and the other team members played would likely be overlooked. For example, when Hendo came up with their design for a hoverboard in 2014 it sprouted from founder Greg Henderson discussing the idea with his wife and co-founder Jill, which they then disseminated to the rest of the thirteen-member development team. Similarly, Scott Clark, CEO of SigOpt, a 2014 Silicon Valley startup focusing on new-age business optimization software, credits a good portion of the innovative ability of his top management team to their offline dyadic communications. To this end, he says, “Having weekly 1-1s has been really helpful in allowing for quick, productive brainstorming on new, orthogonal ideas. By debating tradeoffs and having both of us switch between opposing sides quickly we can refine good ideas and rapidly discard poor ones. The nature of the 1-1 also allows for a level of creativity that can be lost in larger group meetings that tend to iterate on the status quo.”

One of the first domains within organizational research to recognize the importance of the pattern of relationships within a group was the work of William Foote Whyte and George Homans on status. Status is viewed as a hierarchical relationship among people based on the respect they garner from others. In this way a group can be seen as a hierarchy where some members receive more respect from their peers than others. Further, those members with high status are seen as performing better and generally receive more group resources. Whyte’s classic analysis of small group behavior in *Street Corner Society* is a case in point. The acknowledged

group leader “Doc” earned his leader status through his demonstrated prowess in such highly valued group athletic activities as boxing and bowling and being a highly proficient and convincing public speaker. Because Doc’s higher status often translated into more group resources, and for this reason alone, group members often competed for higher status, and in doing so primarily succeeded in undermining each other to the detriment of team information sharing and performance. In this way, the behavior of two team members can undermine the efforts of all others in the team.

Additionally, because status is used as a signal for the allocation of group resources, such as time, money, and equipment, teams typically function more efficiently if all members have the same view of the status hierarchy within their team. Generally speaking, when members do not agree on which of them has high or low status, sharing information and other resources becomes an overly complex process. For these reasons, adding high status team members, or members with ambiguous status may cause a decrease in team functioning until the team can adapt to their presence. This is highlighted in the following case.

BACK TO BASEBALL: THE CASE OF A-ROD VERSUS THE BAMBINO

When Alex Rodriguez arrived in New York in 2004, the expectation was that this was going to guarantee a New York Yankee dynasty for years to come. As we mentioned earlier, Rodriguez certainly brought impressive credentials with him and had a very solid first year with the Yankees in 2004, hitting 36 home runs and averaging .286. In fact, his 36 home runs tied Gary Sheffield for the team lead, while his .286 batting average placed 5th among the regulars, and after the incumbent Yankee superstar, Derek Jeter. In addition, there were already insider whisperings regarding possible steroid use by Rodriguez, further detracting from his perceived status. Thus, Rodriguez joined a team with an established hierarchy of star players and there were questions about his strength of character regarding steroid usage. This scenario provides an interesting comparison to that of the Yankee’s first superstar, Babe Ruth.

In 1920, the Boston Red Sox owner, Harry Frazee, needed money. In addition, he had a disgruntled budding superstar named Babe Ruth. To solve these two problems, Frazee sold Ruth for probably \$100,000 (and possibly more) and an additional \$350,000 in loans secured by a mortgage on the home of the Red Sox, Fenway Park. Arguably the greatest baseball player of all-time, Ruth reported to a Yankee team with a number of established players, which had finished 3rd in 1919, but with no reigning superstar. Ruth quickly established the 1920 Yankees as “his” team. Not only did Ruth average a highly impressive .376, but he hit the then unheard of total of 54 home runs (Ruth set the previous Major League record in 1919 at 29), with the next highest Yankee total of 11. In fact, Ruth *individually* hit more home runs than any other of the seven American League *teams*, with his former team, the Red Sox, hitting a total of 22. Thus, Babe Ruth more than doubled the grand total for his entire former team in 1920! The question is *why* did these two acquisitions, made 84 years apart, have such different outcomes for the Yankees? We argue that a major reason for this is that the A-Rod

era Yankees as an organization failed to view the team as a subjective system and thus consider *how* bringing in a new team member would influence the players who already made up the team. Next, we describe how part of this process is dependent on the perceived expertise of one’s teammates, and the perceived skills people are seen as bringing to a team.

TRANSACTIVE MEMORY SYSTEMS AND TRANSPERSONAL EFFICACY

Research on transactive memory systems, or knowledge of the expertise each team member has, has found that teams function better when they know who is good at doing what. For example, engineering teams who train together tend to perform better because members are better able to specialize their knowledge to the benefit of the team, and are able to use each other as knowledge resources. The influence of strong transactive memory systems on team performance is broad. For example, transactive memory has been shown to improve the decision making ability and performance of top management teams in the financial sector, of consulting teams working in a variety of industries, of new product development teams launching products internationally, and has been suggested as a major factor impacting the success of emergency response organizations, such as those used following Hurricane Sandy in 2012.

THE CASE OF HURRICANE SANDY

The Case of Hurricane Sandy really began on August 29, 2005, when Hurricane Katrina landed on the gulf coast of the United States, devastating New Orleans. According to the United States Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which we will return to shortly, Hurricane Katrina resulted in 1,833 deaths, over \$57B in insurance claims, and the displacement of over one million people. Part of the reason for the great scope of this disaster was the slow response of FEMA, and a plethora of miscommunications among FEMA, other federal agencies, and state and local governments who had expertise on the areas affected. For example, FEMA turned away Wal-Mart trailers attempting to bring water to victims, appropriated buses hired by Astor Hotels to move people to higher ground, prevented Amtrak from relocating victims, stopped the Coast Guard from delivering diesel fuel, and ordered \$100M worth of ice for hospitals that was never delivered. In other words, no transactive memory system existed between emergency response agencies. FEMA was simply unaware of which organization was doing what, and which had the expertise and resources to help in certain capacities.

Luckily, before Hurricane Sandy hit the east coast of the United States on October 29th, 2012, FEMA had learned many lessons from their Katrina failure, particularly in regards to building accurate transactive memory systems early in the emergency response process. In fact, the U.S. Government Accountability Office reported that two requirements for successful long term disaster recovery were to have clearly defined recovery roles and responsibilities and to have effective coordination and collaboration among recovery stakeholders. In response, FEMA was more

proactive in coordinating with such federal, state, and local agencies as the Coast Guard, the Red Cross, which mobilized 1,000 workers immediately following the landfall, and the Salvation Army, which mobilized dozens of feeding units in seven states. Additionally, in return, states were able to utilize their local expertise and existing relationships with private, community-based, and media organizations in order to efficiently execute the emergency response. In the case of Sandy, FEMA and the other public and private responders were now better able to more accurately assess what each other were doing, and use this transactive memory system to coordinate their activities and proficiently get resources to those in need.

Similar to research on status, research regarding transactive memory views teams as networks of individuals whose purpose is to connect and utilize knowledge. As one may expect, transactive memory systems become more accurate as team members interact over time and learn about each other's skills and abilities. To that end, certain internal and external processes can help to speed up the development of knowledge networks. For example, teams can be explicitly informed about the skills of their members, or members can be incentivized to research their teammates on their own (this process has been made easier since now team members can Google each other from their smartphones). Additionally, managers can create a team environment with high task interdependence, meaning that team members are made aware that each of them is necessary to complete the task at hand.

Overall, the major takeaway from research on transactive memory systems is that accurate systems improve group performance by allowing members to streamline information flow. Of importance, the idea that singular group members matter to group performance is implicit in this finding since each member of a transactive memory system represents a node of knowledge within the team, without which the team would be less able to gather and synthesize the information they need to solve problems and enact innovative solutions.

Other research streams have built upon the base laid by status and transactive memory research to investigate factors which may influence group processing through an intragroup cognitive network. For example, a great deal of research has shown that a person's confidence in his ability to complete a task (self-efficacy) influences the amount of effort he exerts in completing the task. Building on this, the first author found that team member's perceptions of each other's ability to successfully complete specific tasks (transpersonal efficacy) influences which members are allotted a group's limited resources. First, efficacy networks in basketball teams were investigated. In this case, the sports context constituted a unique environment because team members are always dealing with distributing limited resources. In other words, there is only one ball and only one player can control it at a time. Because of this, the team must quickly decide which player gets to control the ball when playing offense. This study found that the network of player's confidence in each other determines this pattern where teams are more likely to get players the ball where they are confident they can score.

This is interesting not only because it provides evidence that the network of efficacy perceptions that exists in teams

regulates behavior, but also because self-efficacy did not influence performance. This is because it is possible for all players to have high self-efficacy, but in the end only one can shoot each possession. Additionally, not all efficacy networks are accurate, often teams get members who are boisterous or "hog" the ball without taking their skill into consideration. Efficacy networks become more accurate as team member's perceptions of task interdependence increased. Efficacy networks also influence more cognitive tasks, such as who talks in consulting team meetings, since only one person can speak at once.

These findings address the importance of each individual to the team because they are the first to show that team resources flow toward members who engender high confidence in their abilities and away from members in whom teammates do not have as much confidence. In this light, it is easy to imagine that the addition of new team members and/or the subtraction of current team members could lead to a reevaluation of the system because when teams are dealing with scarce resources all resource allocations are adjusted relative to the contributions of the other team members.

This line of research would suggest that the Yankees did not "fail" after bringing in Alex Rodriguez because of his individual performance. Indeed, remember that his individual statistics were quite good. Instead, the findings described suggest that what the Yankees failed to consider when bringing in Rodriguez was that his addition would rearrange the network structure of the entire team. So, if Rodriguez was afforded top status because of his contract, the player who previously got top billing, maybe Derek Jeter, would slide to number two, and number two would slide to number three and so on. Moreover, this adjustment of the hierarchy was likely mirrored in team resource allocation, negatively influencing the attitudes and behaviors of other team members, and harming on the field performance.

INDIVIDUAL SPILLOVER: HOW ONE COOK CAN SAVE OR SPOIL THE SOUP

Until this point, we have discussed the importance of individuals in teams as being related to their place within an established network of relationships, whether those relationships consist of status, expertise, efficacy, or other factors. However, in addition to occupying a space within a network, research has shown that single individuals can influence the thoughts and feelings of their teammates through their own behavior. The study of individuals being able to change the thoughts and behavioral patterns of others has its roots as early as the 1950s when organizational sociologist James March brought forward the discussion of societal norms, or unspoken informal rules that govern individual behavior. For example, in many organizations it is not a formal rule that applicants should wear a suit to a job interview, however, inevitably almost everyone does. The reason for this is that applicants who do not dress appropriately believe that they will likely be punished by not receiving a job offer. Later, psychologists applied the theory of norms to groups. This has provided significant evidence that group founders and prominent members can greatly influence others by setting

behavioral standards within groups, e.g., how to appropriately communicate. In this way, a single group member can influence how his teammates cognitively react to specific behaviors within a group.

THE CASE OF STEVE JOBS AT APPLE

During his tenure as CEO of Apple from 1976 through 2011, Steve Jobs was famous for promoting the importance of making mistakes internally, and quickly recognizing these mistakes, in order to get out revolutionary products as quickly as possible. While it was obviously not written in Apple's employee handbook that employees should fail often and quickly, and while product failures such as Apple Lisa and Macintosh TV did occur, Jobs' attitude allowed this norm to develop within the organization, allowing Apple to be one of the most innovative companies in the world during his tenure. This norm also helped to differentiate Apple from companies such as Microsoft, which was known for focusing on putting out products first and fixing them later.

Norms are so strong that they persist after original members have left the group. In 1961 two psychologists, R.C. Jacobs and Donald Campbell, set out to study exactly how strong norms were. In order to do this, they established a group norm to make reliably incorrect decisions favoring overstating change (e.g., how far a stationary point of light supposedly moved). Then, they slowly replaced the original group members with new members until all original members were gone. They then did this a second time to create a third generation of group members and found that this third generation still followed the original norm, although they altered it slightly. This evidence shows that the cognitive regulations instituted by a few initial group members can influence the way others think for a long period of time.

Later, Yale professor Sigal Barsade took a different approach to investigating how one group member can influence the remainder of the group. Specifically, based on evidence that teams of nurses, accountants, and even cricket players often experience similar moods after prolonged interaction, she wanted to experimentally investigate whether one group member could change the emotions of her peers. To do this, she had a student actor join student project teams and display enthusiasm, warmth, irritability, or sluggishness. She found that one group member displaying enthusiasm or warmth led his teammates to be happier, while irritability and sluggishness led to more negative emotions. This effect is called *emotional contagion* and this finding clearly demonstrates that one group member can influence the emotions of his fellows.

Additionally, more recent research has found that one group member's emotions and attitudes can influence the emotions and attitudes of his fellow group members. For example, the first author found that happy group members are more likely to share their own expertise with the rest of the team, signaling their teammates to follow suit and likewise share their own unique information. This is important because, although teams are generally formed to combine the disparate expertise of their members, many teams instead focus on information all members have in common. However, happy group members were able to adjust the group norm toward sharing uniquely held information, and thus improve group decision making.

Similarly, and building on our earlier discussion of PsyCap, Avey, Avolio and Luthans found that leader's positivity, defined as leader's level of confidence in their abilities, hope, optimism, and resilience, can spillover to followers. Specifically, in a field experiment involving aerospace engineers, they found that engineers were more likely to remain confident, hopeful, optimistic, and resilient when their leaders behaved with these characteristics. Further, this helped to increase the engineer's performance, especially in more complex tasks.

In summary, we have provided evidence that viewing groups as collections of individuals which influence each other to affect information sharing and performance is important. To this end, we have summarized some research providing evidence that single group members occupy roles within the network of the team and that their thoughts and feelings can spillover to influence other members. So, although it can be said that a group is happy or well-coordinated, the addition or subtraction of members without careful consideration could serve to upset that balance. We now discuss how one understudied personal characteristic, individual team member's strength of character, may also spillover to other group members, and influence group performance and other organizational behaviors.

THE INFLUENCE OF POSITIVE CHARACTER STRENGTH ON TEAM PROCESSES

While the topic of character is attracting increased attention from both practitioners and academics, this interest is focused on the individual level of analysis. For example, incorporating the three "moral components" of discipline, attachment, and autonomy, Thomas A. Wright and his colleagues have defined character "as those interpenetrable and habitual qualities within individuals, and applicable to organizations that both constrain and lead them to desire and pursue personal and societal good." From this viewpoint, character is clearly distinguishable from such other positive attributes as values and personality and is shaped by one's convictions and best evidenced by the ability to persist in one's convictions even in the face of strong temptation or moral challenge.

Building upon Peterson's and Seligman's 24 strengths of character taxonomy and incorporating a focus group approach, Wright has developed a number of signature "top-5" character strength profiles for success that respondents (both business students and practitioners) consider to be the most beneficial in attaining success in such occupations as manager, entrepreneur, nurse, engineer, and accountant, among others. Among business student respondents, promising findings indicate that individual-level character strength may be instrumental regarding various indicators of both student achievement and psychological health and well-being. For example, final course grade has been shown to be positively related with the strengths of perspective (wisdom) and industry. In addition, final course grade has also been shown to be related to the degree that students are satisfied with their life. However, we suggest it is not only individual character that matters, but also the way in which teammates perceive each other's character that may influence group performance in a number of exciting ways.

For example, initial evidence indicates that perceiving one's teammates as having high integrity makes people try

harder in group tasks and perform better at both the individual and group level. However, team members who perceive their teammates as prioritizing critical thinking over integrity tend to share less information with them. At the group level, teams whose character profiles prioritize integrity over other character strengths exchange more information with each other, develop more accurate transactive memory systems, and perform better. However, teams which prioritize other character traits, especially critical thinking to the detriment of integrity, tend to interact less and perform worse. This is particularly interesting since individuals who prioritize critical thinking tend to perform better individually. It is only when critical thinking is viewed as a group priority that it becomes detrimental to performance. These findings are important to explaining the role of individual character in team processes since they provide initial evidence that having one team member either high in integrity, or able to make the group as a whole increase their integrity, may allow for better group functioning, whereas group members who are seen to give low priority to integrity stand in the way of such effective group functioning.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We began our article by noting that a team in which 92% of the members agree on a decision (in this case the guilt of the accused in the acclaimed movie *12 Angry Men*) may be reasonably expected to make that decision. However, the complexities of group decisions that often seem logical, such as signing Alex Rodriguez as a free agent, or foregone, such as the impeachment of President Andrew Johnson, can be much better understood by viewing teams as subjective systems, where each member holds perceptions of themselves, their teammates, and the team as a whole. In fact, interactions between teammates, and the manner in which they change the perceptions of the team members involved, often tell a greater story than viewing a team as a holistic entity. Currently, we suggest two exciting and distinct ways in which viewing teams as subjective systems can help us understand how they will function: by viewing the team as a network of parts which influence each other and by understanding that the thoughts, emotions, and possibly strength of character of one (or more) teammate(s) can spillover to others. Further,

both have serious implications for anyone in charge of managing groups and teams. Most salient is the idea that team members affect each other. Therefore, before adding anyone to a team, managers should consider how new additions will influence the team processes that have already been developed. Additionally, adding team members with strong convictions may have those convictions, or associated emotions, spillover to teammates.

Perhaps our potential contribution is best considered in the context of Gestalt psychology. A central theme of Gestalt psychology is that the whole (“team”) is not only greater than the sum of its parts (the ‘I’s), but that the nature of the whole fundamentally alters these parts. As we have established here, while true, this classic Gestalt approach is incomplete. Yes, the nature of the whole fundamentally alters the parts, but the individual parts (the ‘I’s in a team) can also fundamentally alter the whole in a number of different ways.

Moreover, earlier we mentioned that Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England, is convinced that especially in today’s world, employees need to develop a broader sense of purpose or strength of character. According to two business ethics professors, Robert Giacalone and Mark Promislo, there is no better time than the present to begin. Naming it the *stigmatization of goodness*, Giacalone and Promislo describe an increasingly occurring phenomenon in today’s society in which supposedly moral people are condemned in team settings because they are seen as threats to the status quo. For example, research on whistleblowers, such as Eli Lilly’s Robert Rudolph, makes evidently clear that what they find most difficult is that they are often intentionally shunned and isolated by their fellow team members for just trying to do the right thing! Furthermore, to protect themselves from negative publicity or scandal, organizations will often recruit other members of the organization to do the “dirty work” and further slander the whistleblower’s reputation. So what needs to be done? Our discussion of the exciting work on transactive memory systems, teams as networks, and the possibility of a team-level strengths of character profile provide hope that a focus on the ‘I’s in a team can be a force for increasing not only team performance, but also various indicators of team member well-being, strength of character, and maybe even the greater social good.



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Kyle Emich (Ph.D., Cornell University, School of Industrial and Labor Relations) is an assistant professor of business administration at the Alfred Lerner College of Business and Economics at The University of Delaware. He has published articles in outlets such as *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, and *Psychological Science* among others. He has received best paper awards from both *The Academy of Management* and *The Interdisciplinary Network for Group Research (INGroup)* and his work has been cited in outlets such as *The Wall Street Journal*, *Harvard Business Review*, *The Boston Globe* and *Scientific American Mind* (Management Area, University of Delaware, Newark, DE, United States. Tel.: +1 845 380 7498. email: kemich@udel.edu).

Thomas A. Wright (Ph.D., University of California, Berkeley) is the Felix E. Larkin Distinguished Professor in Management at Fordham University. Similar to the Claude Rains character from the classic movie, *Casablanca*, he has published in many of the “usual suspects.” In recognition of his career accomplishments, he has been award Fellow status in the *Association for Psychological Science*, the *American Psychological Association*, the *Western Psychological Association*, and the *Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*. He enjoys spending time with his wife (Kay), family and friends, hiking in the mountains, walking on a quiet beach, prayerful meditation and competitively lifting weights (Management Systems Area, Fordham University, Bronx, NY, United States. Tel.: +1 775 772 5915. email: twright17@fordham.edu).