

Breaking the Silence

Opening

Have you ever found yourself hesitating to challenge the opinion of your superior?

Today, I stand before you to share my personal experience where I recommended a routine that enhanced productivity and quality of my team in our professional work.

Toastmaster of the day, My fellow audience.

Setting Context

Before delving into the details, I would like to provide some context for those who may not be familiar with how software projects operate. We have two primary teams in my projects: the software development team, responsible for writing the code, and the software quality team, also known as the software testing team, which tests the software developed by the development team, by the way I am part of development team.

Both teams always in fighting mode, however A common thing between two teams is bug or defect, one team tries to avoid it where another team finds to avoid it, whoever does best in it appreciated, if not criticized.

Problem

There was one incident I would like share where with the shift to remote work due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our engineering head noticed an increase in defects counts in our NTR project, NTR is name of project I work. So, in a team call, the development team was criticized heavily and questioned about quality and productivity of work.

Realization

During that meeting, there was pin drop salience no one objected to their criticism including my manager or my super manger. I got hurt and asked myself why we were receiving negative feedback despite working very hard tirelessly.

Post to that for couple of days I observed my daily working pattern in official work, I understood what the root cause is and devised impactful solution to address it.

Communication Plan

So, I decided to develop a proper communication plan to deliver my message,

1. wherein I would share difficulties we were facing as a developer and solutions to address.
2. Since we were working remotely, I had two options as communication channels: Teams calls and emails. I opted for E-mail delivering a more impactful message.
3. Audience for my email were engineering head, managers, and my fellow team members, So I decided to go for a more formal and respectful tone while writing that email

Solution

In structuring my message, I implemented a three-part approach to effectively convey it.

Firstly, I emphasized the fundamental requirements for developers to produce high-quality, productive software is a deep concentration and a focused environment.

Secondly, I addressed the two main challenges hindering our deep work.

1. Frequent context switch – Context switch where we constantly switch between tasks. As per the studies, context switch is number one productivity killer.

People who work remotely always respond to messages quickly, even though they are in the middle of some important work. They believe they are giving proof to their managers that they are online and working. but they don't realize that they are getting distracted.

2. Long meetings with minimal participation and lesser outcomes. Or meeting where only one person talks.

Recommendations

Two Recommendation to address above challenges

1. Proposed Dedicated Deep Work Hours for uninterrupted hours for focused good quality work, namely 11 AM to 1 PM and 3 PM to 5 PM. During these hours, developers will be free to ignore instant messages, emails, and meetings.

If they want to keep meeting, they can take it before 11 am, so it will force some latecomers to come on time, especially managers. And between 2 pm and 3 pm, anyway, we don't feel like working during that hour, since after a heavy lunch everyone goes into sleepy mode.

2. Redefining meeting style

We should consider meeting only when email or instant messages don't help.

Reduced meeting time - Limit team meetings to 25 minutes when all team members are involved.

Adding relevant and necessary participants in meetings instead of the complete team.

Most importantly, Sharing the meeting agenda or meeting memo before the meeting.

Impact

In Conclusion I would like to share the impact post to that communication.

I would not say upper management followed or implemented all the recommendations or suggestions I shared,

But two things happened post my email communication

1st Upper management realized and agreed that we were indeed getting distracted.

2nd Most importantly, that is what I loved. Due to that message, my fellow team members became aware that they are also, like me, were being distracted.

3rd Today, no team member is objected to or judged if they don't respond promptly to any message. Additionally, managers have started respecting the time of fellow team members.

Take away message -

Thanks, you so much for listening to my experience so patiently, back to you toastmaster of the day.