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Context to the nugget conversation

Michiel speaks about how in a team, we can have a chain reaction where people end up triggering each other and that could really be counter-productive. He speaks about how teams can collectively access “mini – balcony moments” to deal with these situations.

Transcription

Deepak Jayaraman (DJ): And moving to group dynamics Michiel, in the book, you talk about moving from exploring icebergs individually to exploring the collective iceberg as a team which I found really interesting, and in that context, you actually talk about a domino effect which I found intriguing. I was particularly curious about how something like a domino effect might play out in a family context. My wife and I, we have two kids, 13 and 9, so there are these passages of play where each one of us is triggering the other, and I love the notion of the domino effect, so if you could talk a little bit about this notion of the collective iceberg as a unit, but also this concept of the domino effect that sometimes we observe in groups.

Michiel Kruyt (MK): Yeah. So let us talk a little bit about icebergs. So we spoke about awareness of your thoughts, your self-talk and your emotions and your body state. In a way, that is kind of level one. You see what is going on in the here and now in your self-talk and in your emotions. What you do not know yet is where do they come from, what is driving those. Now what is driving those has a lot to do with your history, the culture you grow up in, the values you hold, beliefs you have, what success looks like, what is being expected of you, so that forms the next level of your iceberg and that creates patterns. We all walk into teams with our individual icebergs, and there is a collective team iceberg. So there is a collective, you have a collective family iceberg, I am sure, where you have some shared values, you have expected behaviours and you know what you want to create. The individual icebergs will bounce into each other, and you very often see that with, if you bring it to the family with children, in the birth order, they very often pick different icebergs, so by definition, they bounce into each other, because they are competing, the icebergs are competing. So in business teams, you see people, and we talked about the domino effect because the triggers react on each other, the triggers of people react on each other. So if I have a high need for respect, what I call respect, people listening to each other in the team, and I have a colleague that has a high need for speed and decision making, then his, what in my view would be, shortcutting a discussion will trigger my need for respect and listening to each other and then, we are going into this dance, and you see that all the time. And when people start to see it, so we often do this, this trigger exercise where people share their allergies in the team, what are we allergic for, and it is very funny because you can immediately. even not having worked with the team, I can point out the behavioural patterns that will be happening in this team.

DJ: Hmm. And I guess it is almost like a nuclear chain reaction with no cadmium rods. And maybe back to the point you made that is where either an active observer or a collective skylight where we are able to catch ourselves and maybe raise our hand and say, which mode are we in can sort of change the dynamic.

MK: Yeah, the interesting thing about our biology, it is very predictable and we also know how to manage it. So if you are in this intense stuckness, very busy getting nowhere, very intensely busy getting nowhere and someone raises his hands and say, hey, we often call it, let us take a balcony moment. Then within 20 seconds, people look at each other and they restart the conversation and they are at the level of learning because your amygdala disengages, this whole limbic reaction system disengages when you take a breather.

DJ: And in that moment, is there a ritual or two as a team that you suggest, or is it just even giving 30 seconds is often enough to reset that conversation?

MK: Well, asking the question, let us take a balcony moment. And then what often is, good is to just do a quick round of, hey, how do we feel, and then you get back into the discussion.

DJ: Hmm. No what I love about that is it does not point fingers at an individual, it just points to the temperature in the room to say this is not helpful and goes around the room and resets the temperature if you will to have a more productive dialogue. Very often in these situations, it gets personal very quickly and gets one on one and gets bilateral.

MK: Yeah, that is a point. So you have to make it more normal than normal that this happens. And you also should not make it a deeply psychological therapy session every time that this happens because then you cannot get anything done. So there is a place for that as well if you go deeper into the patterns but when you are in business meetings, it is actually good to have a way to quickly move through this and get back into learning.

DJ: Hmm. It is a great point. Yeah, there is a risk of overdoing it and not getting work done and sort of going down a rabbit hole which often is not productive in a business context. Got it. And as you think about your work Michiel, are there specific nuances that come about when people work with teams in a virtual context? Some of these things end up taking slightly different shapes and forms when eight different people are in different locations. Any additional nuances you would like to throw on how to handle the collective iceberg when you are distributed?

MK: Yeah, sometimes it makes it easier because it is easier to kind of like, people do not talk so much through each other, there is less talking at the same time in Zoom meetings or Teams meetings, yet you need to spend more time on the fabric of the team in a way. So you need to do a little bit more check-ins and check-outs, like, are we actually feeling good with this conversation, did everyone feel heard and are we aligned on what we decided. Being a little bit more explicit about doing those checks at the end and before you discuss, talk a little bit about what people want to get out of it, makes it a deeper dialogue because you cannot read the body language that well.

Reflections from Deepak Jayaraman

DJ: In these situations, I have realized that it is critical to be careful about the language we use when we are triggered. In this context, I find the work of David Bradford (DB) very helpful. He uses the metaphor of not crossing the net while communicating to another person especially when they are afraid.

DB: *“You can say almost anything to almost anybody if you stick with your reality. In fact, we add after two glasses of wine, we drop the almost because sort of in our heart of hearts think you can say anything to anybody if you stick with your reality. But being academics, we cover ourselves. So, what do we mean by three realities? In interacting, I only know two realities and you know two realities. So, let’s take Deepak you and me. Reality number one is my motives, intentions which leads to my behaviour. Reality number two, my words, my nonverbals, my tone etcetera. The third reality is the impact on you, how does it affect you? So, the model is similar to the McKinsey model but we, I think, elaborate little differently and what we say is I know two realities. My motives and I can see the behaviour, you know two realities, you can see the behaviour and you know the effect on you. But you don’t know my motives and I don’t know the impact, but I need to know the impact if I am to be effective. So, we then envision a... and we actually envision two tennis nets, but I am going to talk about one. The first one is between my intentions, motives and intentions and my behaviour. The second net is between behaviour and your effect, but let me focus on the first. As in tennis, you can’t play in the other person’s backcourt, we often get into trouble so frequently and conflict gets worse because you the recipient of my behaviour don’t stay on your side of the court. So, think of how much feedback is so commonly used in organizations. We say to somebody else, will you just still want to be a team player, you just want to push your own area, you don’t care about me or my area, you just want to dominate. Well, you are over the net because you are making statements about my motives and intentions that you don’t know. It is a story you are making up. And so, when we say stick with your reality you could say anything. Let’s imagine that you are now feeling a little tuned out because you are experiencing me as giving you more information than you want. So, if you were to say, well, David, you just want to show how smart you are, I am going to get defensive, but the other problem with that is I can just say no, I don’t and it has little impact. But if you stick with your reality and you say David, I am feeling bothered and I am feeling a little tuned out because I am experiencing you as going on and on and talking too much. Now, I can’t say no, you don’t but I am over your net. I am likely to say, well, I am sorry, that’s not my intention, and I am trying to be helpful. And you can say, well, I am glad you are trying to be helpful and I would like you to be helpful but the way you are now acting isn’t helpful to me. And now we can have a conversation of how I can be helpful. And so much of conflict is accusations, making up these stories and people not sticking with what they knew, no, which is this is how I feel, this is how your behaviour is impacting me. And this is how it is interfering with our relationship.”*

DJ: I find that very often, the language we use can be a detonator that can lead to a messy explosion. Just being careful about the language we use can help us get to a better place without too much unnecessary collateral damage.

Thank you for listening.

End of nugget transcription

Nugget from David Bradford that is referenced: [Healthy feedback - not crossing the net.](#)

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About Deepak Jayaraman

Deepak seeks to unlock the human potential of senior executive's / leadership teams by working with them as an Executive Coach / Sounding Board / Transition Advisor. You can know more about his work [here](#).

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