

# Why kindness is important in managing a project team

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In a world where competition and cut-throat business is commonplace, researchers are finding that kindness could be the secret ingredient to unlocking team cohesion, efficiency and creativity.

Kindness is defined as being friendly, generous and considerate – or as many a grandmother has been saying: good manners. ‘Inspire me with kindness not with fear’ should become the new mantra of leaders in the workplace.

Happiness researcher Shawn Achor shows that a positive brain makes you more creative, healthier, intelligent and productive – qualities we are all looking for in a team member. “Happiness is the joy you feel moving towards your potential” he wrote in his new book *Big Potential*.

For many years the saying in business was that nice guys finish last – but an increasing body of research shows that this is actually not true. What was considered as a ‘soft skill’ – being emotionally sensitive and treating others with kindness – and left to the employee engagement experts, has in fact turned out to be a significant factor in upping productivity and quality of work.

Despite this, several data sources report that incivility in the workplace is on the rise. Bad news in a world where studies consistently show that kindness is having a profound effect. The 2015 *Civility Matters!* report compiled by Craig Dowden for the Canadian Civil Service found that where respect and kindness thrived so did energy (26 per cent increase), motivation and openness to entertain new ideas and learn new skills (30 per cent increase) and job satisfaction and commitment (36 per cent increase).

## Nice guys lead better teams

Amy Cuddy, a lecturer at Harvard Business School, found in her research that leaders who project warmth are more effective than those who predominantly project toughness. She argues that the reason for this is that kindness increases feelings of trust, and claims that her research showed this can increase team performance. She argues that where efficiency is valued more than trust a culture develops where employees are protecting their self-interest leaving team goals less important. This culture of 'every employee for himself' could in the long run lead to team goals being sacrificed for individual protection.

## Kindness makes you work faster

Research done by the University of Warwick found that people who are happy are more productive at work – 12 per cent more to be exact – as they use their time better and also work faster without sacrificing quality.

## Rudeness makes you unhelpful

In an article published in *Harvard Business Review* Christine Porath said her work shows that teams who work in an environment where rudeness, bullying, demeaning comments and insults are commonplace become fractured and team members lose confidence, have low levels of trust and become less helpful. Bad behaviour, she adds, destroys collaboration, is harmful to mental health and has been proven to be a major barrier to efficiency.

## Kindness fosters productivity and creativity

In an extensive leadership study, Jack Zenger and Joseph Folkman tracked close to 20,000 leaders and found a strong link between those who were kind and those who were most effective. Their data showed that an unkind leader had a 1 in 2000 chance to also be effective. Strong emotional connections, integrity, thriving coach and mentor relationships, a focus on cooperation rather than competition and communicating a vision for the future were some of the traits that increased a leader's kindness score.

The Zenger Folkman study was overwhelmingly supported by research done by the University of Michigan that found a strong link between kindness and respect and an increase in creativity at both individual and team level.

## Kindness makes you healthier

Apart from all the excellent benefits for team and project outcomes, a new study also showed that kindness has a remarkably positive influence on employee health and wellbeing. Christine Carter from the University of Berkeley's Greater Good Science Centre said their research shows that helping others actually boosts overall health.

## Final thoughts

There are many skills which are widely acknowledged as valuable to project managers, or managers of any kind, such as organisation, conflict resolution, negotiation and communication. However one equally important skill is often overlooked: kindness. We may not pay much attention to kindness in a professional setting, but adopting an attitude of kindness in the way we deal with our team, our superiors and our clients can actually have incredible pay offs.

Research shows that treating people with kindness not only leads to happier teams, but also ones which are more productive, creative and even healthier. All of this may translate into better outcomes and a more successful project.

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Date: 4 October 2016

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