Feelstorming©: Coaching Professional Teams

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"What's up with our team? What's the feeling of group members, where we are? What are our strengths and weaknesses?"

To reflect these questions in a team, we gathered interesting insights applying the technique of FEELSTORMING© as developed by the author. FEELSTORMING© is flexible, might cause serious thoughts as well as being humorous, contributing to building up a team of motivated members.

Based on analogy and free association the process starts like brainstorming, where you just let your thoughts go. But this time you are encouraged - however not limited to - let your feelings go.

With this method of FEELSTORMING© one person takes the whole group into an imaginative given situation for a start-up by making use of personal identification with impersonal objects. Then the participants are invited into a free process of narrative development of the story.

These are the steps

1. Bring together all members or a few volunteers of your team in a circle. You are going to tell the very beginning of a story. Then you would like to encourage them to continue with *whatever* comes to their mind.

2. It is not important that the contribution is connected to the previous or the latter one. Participants are invited to tell, whatever they feel, think, wish, fear, value, hate, love by placing themselves in this situation and identifying themselves with the object.

3. Whoever wants to say something may speak. The process does not follow a certain order, participation is invited randomly or better *voluntarily*.

4. Remember *not to judge or evaluate* any idea, everything is welcome!

5. One or a few persons are appointed to listen and to observe the scenery.

Both aspects, number three and four, are very important, otherwise the participants might not want to share their feelings with or expose them to the rest of the group.

Using the Technique of FEELSTORMING© such a story could start like

*We find ourselves in the middle of computer items. "I am in charge of getting rid of useless parts. **I enjoy** dumping the stuff. Sometimes I carry lots and lots of data around and **I suffer** from shoulder aching. **I am** the delete-button of the PC keyboard. **I feel responsible**, that the right text version will be displayed on the screen. Usually **we get** along quite well, but sometimes **I am** in conflict with the insert-button. One day* [stop here and wait for others to join in]*…"*

> **for a discussion about the team situation, project course or bottlenecks in a project, (that might be or might as well not be IT-related)…**

or

*"**I am** a chemical liquid in the middle of a laboratory. The microscope is next to me, yawning after yesterday's part, good fun, short night. **I find myself** in a test-tube, surrounded by other test-tubes with other liquids. **I feel** this test-tube is too small for me. What should **I do** next? **I raise** my head and..."*

> **for a discussion round on team visions, potential conflicts and other team issues…**

The **strength** of FEELSTORMING© lies with the following:

- it encourages people to express fantasy, feelings and emotions

- it creates a safe environment where feelings and experiences can be shared

- the feelings are not judged or evaluated. At this stage nobody is discussing the morally "right" position, what "you should / you should not do", what is socially acceptable, etc.

- it encourages empathy, looking at a situation from different points of views

- the variety of complex or even contradictory ideas enriches the discussion later on

Experience with Latin American Training-Of-Trainer-Groups revealed the following:

- participants were astonished by their own reactions. They never thought they would be so courageous to talk that openly about such sensitive issues (like feeling embarrassed, neglected…).

- the topics in fact were seen from all angles, ranging from fear to joy, anger to happiness, satisfaction to dislike...

- a variety of emotions reflects "real life experience" of people – here they are taken seriously, they are not alone, there are others who share the same feelings.

- such an exercise does not deny, but encourages a follow-up discussion about values and socially acceptable behavior. Why? Because it starts by experiencing the complexity of the situation by looking into it instead of quickly making judgments which prevent a deeper understanding, engagement and hence commitment.

- serious issues could be addressed with humor.

Limitations of the technique

A trusting confidential environment is important. These techniques are not advisable in situations where voluntary participants could be "blamed" or "embarrassed" by others. The technique is not designed for documenting information and knowledge.

Literature

FEELSTORMING© in: Weigang, Silke / Soddemann, Monika: Non-Formal Training on Population Education and Youth Leadership, FAO Rome 1999

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