

DO GOOD TO LEAD WELL

WITH CRAIG DOWDEN, PHD



NAME



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Episode: Unlocking Team Success with Colin Fisher's Insights on Group Dynamics and Positive Leadership

What You'll Learn

- ✔ Optimal group size for performance and satisfaction
- ✔ Social Sensitivity as a Predictor of Group Effectiveness
- ✔ Trust Builds through Task-Based Interactions
- ✔ Challenges and Remedies for Remote/Hybrid Team Dynamics
- ✔ The Crucial Role of Clear and Aligned Goals

Optimal group size for performance and satisfaction (10:33)

Research indicates that the ideal group size for effective performance and member satisfaction lies between three and seven people, with about 4.5 being the sweet spot. Groups larger than this tend to suffer from coordination difficulties and social loafing, where individuals subconsciously reduce their effort because of diluted accountability. Smaller groups allow each member to be visible, responsible, and motivated to contribute fully. Leaders often face the challenge of larger teams, especially in senior management, but the solution isn't necessarily to reduce headcount but to create smaller subgroups for actual work or decision-making while maintaining larger assemblies for culture and alignment. This balance enhances productivity and satisfaction, creating groups that are more than just the sum of individuals.

Actionable Insights:

- Keep work-focused teams between 3-7 members whenever possible.
- If your overall group is larger, break it into smaller subgroups for specific tasks or decisions.
- Ensure every member's role and responsibilities are clearly defined to prevent social loafing.
- Regularly check in to gauge if individuals feel seen and accountable in the group.
- Avoid overloading meetings with too many voices; smaller groups enable more meaningful participation.



Social Sensitivity as a Predictor of Group Effectiveness (15:08)

“Social sensitivity” is a stronger predictor of effective collective performance than intelligence or technical skills. Teams high in social sensitivity can intuit emotions like frustration or excitement without explicit verbalization, which facilitates smoother coordination and trust.

While this trait tends to be higher on average among women, the practical takeaway is to cultivate or select for emotional attunement and interpersonal awareness when forming teams. Intrinsic motivation and task-relevant skills remain important, but adding social sensitivity creates a more adaptable, cohesive team capable of working well across varied challenges.



Actionable Insights:

- Encourage team members to practice active listening and empathy to enhance social sensitivity.
- When composing teams, prioritize a mix of skills and emotional awareness rather than just titles or IQ.
- Foster open communication that allows members to express feelings nonverbally and verbally.
- Include team-building activities that raise mutual awareness of emotions and nonverbal signals.
- Promote psychological safety so members feel safe sharing and responding to each other's emotional states.





Trust Builds through Task-Based Interactions (30:20)

Contrary to popular belief, trust doesn't have to fully exist before a team can perform effectively. Instead, trust and task performance have a reciprocal relationship; doing work together allows trust to grow. Research highlights that team-building efforts are most effective when tightly integrated with the team's work context rather than isolated social retreats or unrelated activities. High-fidelity simulations and work-related exercises where mistakes are safe to make encourage trust through shared challenges and achievements. If a team is already deeply distrustful, interventions must consider relaunching and restructuring the team to reset dynamics and expectations.

Actionable Insights:

- Design team-building sessions to closely mimic actual work tasks or challenges.
- Facilitate collaborative problem-solving exercises that promote shared accountability.
- Avoid relying solely on social outings or retreats to build trust; combine with purpose-driven work.
- In teams with trust issues, consider a "relaunch" with new norms, goals, and facilitators.
- Emphasize learning from mistakes without blame to deepen mutual trust as the team progresses.

Challenges and Remedies for Remote/Hybrid Team Dynamics (34:44)

Remote and hybrid work increase psychological distance and reduce the richness of social cues, impairing social sensitivity and emotional connection. Physical separation causes people to view others more as abstract objects, weakening empathy and collaboration. Counteracting this requires intentional efforts to humanize virtual interactions.

Simple practices like sharing personal updates, creating informal “catch-up” times, or showcasing hobbies can restore some of the emotional richness lost in virtual settings. Teams that proactively address psychological distance create stronger connections, improving coordination and overall performance despite physical separation.

Actionable Insights:

- Allocate time at the start of virtual meetings for informal check-ins or personal sharing.
- Encourage team members to use video and maintain authentic backgrounds to increase presence.
- Rotate “show and tell” or “personal project” segments to deepen relational bonds.
- Build routines for early arrivals or post-meeting social time virtually to simulate informal office chats.
- Be mindful of psychological distance and explicitly reinforce the human element in all communication.



The Crucial Role of Clear and Aligned Goals (41:30)

Clarity and alignment on goals form the foundation of successful teamwork. Teams often drift into conflict or inefficiency when members hold different interpretations of the group's purpose. Goals should be treated like shared destinations everyone understands and commits to. In creative or exploratory projects, explicit agreement on phased goals helps align expectations. Leaders should embed goal clarity as a habitual agenda item, opening meetings by confirming shared understanding and inviting any needed clarifications or reframing. This ongoing alignment reduces friction and keeps teams focused on collective success.

Actionable Insights:

- Start every meeting by explicitly stating and confirming the goal or purpose.
- If goals are evolving, communicate transparently about the phase and what success looks like at each step.
- Actively invite diverse perspectives to ensure everyone's understanding aligns.
- Break down large goals into smaller, actionable milestones with shared accountability.
- Revisit and adjust goals regularly as teams gain new insights or conditions change.

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