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EFFECTIVE PROJECT EXECUTION SERVICES

The Principles of Collaborative Project Delivery

Introduction

This study is divided into the following four sections which are compiled to lead you though the rationale for how the principles of collaborative project delivery came to life. The process itself was less designed than it was organically developed and refined over time by a group of collaborators simply working together to deliver their project mandates. Thereby, I can't take credit for its creation. I was simply part of the wonderful team who brought this process to be. It ultimately belongs to the group of people who made it their own. I feel a sense of responsibility to amalgamate this process into a framework for you to question, apply on your own and hopefully share with your own teams.

Let's get started. Together we will…..

"THE WAY TO GET STARTED IS TO QUIT
TALKING AND BEGIN DOING."

WALT DISNEY

Introduce

Why social activity influences collaboration and helps reinforce respect and trust.
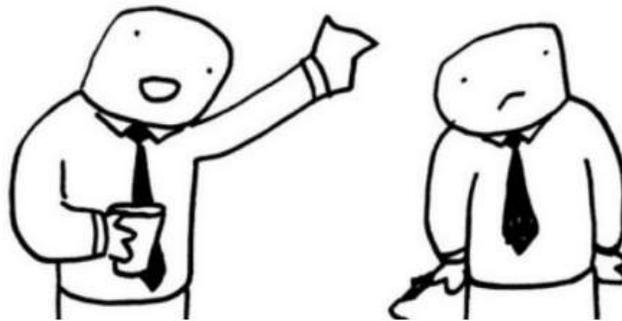
Now that's no way to start a conversation, is it?

It's funny, but it's definitely not the best way to build a collaborative team or to build professional relationships but it does demonstrate the power of communication. What is the guy on the right thinking? I'm sure you can come up with some choice responses.

That begs another question.

How well do you know the people you work with every day?

What do you know about their lives, who they are and what their interests are? The answers to those questions are the **social currency** [1] we build in our work economy. How often have you heard, "It's who you know as much as what you know"?

That "who you know" is social currency in action.

Social currency is a social media term that is basically defined as the resources you develop by being present in social networks, both online and offline. We are going to focus on the offline where I feel interaction flourishes and where relationships are truly solidified. Face to face.

In this context, the **social part** is understanding what makes people tick – things like what gets someone out of bed in the morning, their likes or even their dislikes.

The **currency** part is how we use our understanding of who the people around us are to:

- set and manage expectations,
- understand how people work and what works best for them,
- understand how people may be most effective,
- strategically introduce new challenges into people's routine.

We can easily assign work, set expectations and even present our team members with new challenges without getting to know them at all, but the results will be very different. When you have no idea who your team is all you have to rely on is what their resume says and we all know what's on paper isn't the whole story. You can make more informed decisions on how your team members will respond to challenges and assignments when you can incorporate your knowledge of them as individuals into your strategies at work.

And you don't have to be a psychologist to understand who you're working with.

By simply observing, listening, talking to your team members, and showing interest in their lives you can learn as much as you need to about them without compromising your professionalism. You can't be best friends with everyone and that's not the point here. Appropriate familiarity goes a long, long way and hey, if you make a new friend, great. If not, that's ok too.

It doesn't take much to learn enough about your team to understand them better, especially if you ask the right questions. It all depends on the situation but regardless of how well you know your team I like to try to keep things a little more open-ended as opposed to something that elicits a single word response. An open ended question is likely to elicit a story and give you something to work with; a "How are you?" will probably get, "Fine." There's not much social currency in "fine."

All that social stuff sounds like it takes a lot of time, we all understand our projects are normally fast-paced and time is of the essence. What's more, your team likely changes from project to project which might lead you to say, "Who has time for that?"

Try thinking about it this way.

If you make time to get to know the individuals on your team then you're actually investing in the future, you're building you knowledge base and you'll be able to better map out how your project workflow will be structured for the long haul. Getting great work done can be much easier using your social knowledge (social currency) as a way to select the right resources or skill sets your team has to offer.

You don't need to know everything about your team members, just enough to understand who they are. That familiarity, and the deeper relationships that develop as a team works together over time, can help the team to **absorb change**, **recognize opportunity** and **discover efficiencies** much more quickly – and that's where we all should want to get to. The goal is to build a team that learns and grows together over time.

But there's one key ingredient a team needs to ensure social currency can thrive.

Trust is earned and it develops naturally in a team as it builds its social currency. As people grow together, get to know each other and learn to depend on one another, they feel more comfortable and are willing to offer more of themselves. They will fulfill their roles without wasting time positioning, playing politics or defending their turf. The team can focus instead on what's important to them – their tasks and deliverables all the while knowing someone's got their back.

The three principles in the collaborative delivery process, **Partnership, Lessons Learned** and **Continuous Improvement,** help a team arrive at that place and stay there once they do. There's nothing complex or mysterious about each of these principles themselves. The magic lies in their integration to the project delivery process and what their application means to the outcome of a successful project.

The following statement forms the basis from which the principles above were derived. Notice that success is used twice in two slightly different ways.

*Collaborative project delivery breaks down the silos of responsibility requiring close cooperation among all major participants, and it aligns **participant success** to **project success**.*

Project success is what we all want.

Since project success is normally the **focus** of a project, we tend to overlook the other fundamental reason why this process of Partnership, Lessons Learned and Continuous Improvement is so crucial to project success.

It's **participant success!**

Participant success isn't something that we regularly focus on, is it?

The principles of Partnership, Lessons Learned and Continuous Improvement are designed to change that. They focus primarily on the participant and that's the reason why social currency fits so well into the process. It helps us turn the singular focus away from simply delivering the project and helps us find a way to include the people who are providing the expertise to make it happen. It's not difficult to understand but day to day it's a challenge to shift our focus in that way. In order to achieve real project success we need to change our way of thinking about project delivery in this simple but fundamental way.

People first.

Using the principles of Partnership, Lessons Learned and Continuous Improvement as our framework, we will demonstrate how the silos of responsibility (internal and external) can be intertwined and how they become interdependent. This integrated approach facilitates cooperation, and the **residual benefit** is project success.

The fact that people make the project and the focus on how participant success yields project success is summed up beautifully by psychiatrist Viktor Frankl [2] in his book "Man's Search for Meaning."

*The more you aim at success and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue as the **unintended side-effect** of one's personal dedication to a course greater than oneself.*

What's the best way to describe the **interdependent relationship** social currency builds between the people on a project team?

Collaboration.

Collaboration is a component of Partnership, Lessons Learned and Continuous Improvement. Without collaboration these principles would have no substance. The dictionary definition of collaboration is, *the act or process of collaborating* which is not very helpful. But the definition of collaborate contains a few phrases that has helped us get a better understanding of collaboration in the context of a project team.

- to **work jointly with others or together** especially in an intellectual endeavour.
- to **cooperate with** or **willingly assist** an enemy of one's country especially an occupying force.
- to cooperate with an agency with which **one is not immediately connected.**

I have highlighted some words and phrases from the definitions that helped us better relate collaboration to a project team.

- work jointly with others or together
- cooperate with
- willingly assist
- cooperate with an agency we are not immediately connected.

The context of the definitions is as important here as words highlighted above.

Take a look at an *agency with which one is not immediately connected.*

Doesn't that feel like a common condition of many projects? It certainly seems pretty common yet we collaborate every day to get things done. Collaboration doesn't appear to be difficult. We willingly assist people. We work together, we cooperate and we help people who are not part of our core team.

Think about it. In general, we all get along, right?

Then why can collaboration be so tough at times?

Here's a little game that helps to demonstrates how our human nature plays such a large part in day to day collaborative activities. Think about this in context of a project team.

It's called the prisoners' dilemma [3].

In this version of the game two members of a gang are taken into custody. Each prisoner is in solitary confinement with no means of speaking to or exchanging messages with the other. The police admit they don't have enough evidence to convict them both on the principal charge, so they plan to sentence both to a year in prison on a lesser charge.

At the same time the police offer each prisoner a deal.

If one testifies against his buddy, he will go free and his partner will get three years in prison. However to keep things interesting, those crafty cops throw a wrench into the works! If both guys testify against each other, both will be sentenced to two years in jail. What choice would you make?

*In this situation, collaboration is **dominated** by betrayal; if one guy chooses to stay silent, then his buddy betrays him and gets the reward (no sentence instead of one year), and if the other guy chooses to betray then betraying his buddy also gives a better reward (two years instead of three). In this case, because betrayal always rewards more than cooperation, all purely rational **self-interested** people would betray their friend, and the only possible outcome for two **purely rational** people is for them both to betray each other.*

The interesting part of this game is that pursuing individual reward logically leads the prisoners to both betray, but we all know they would get a better reward if they both cooperated. In reality, statistics have shown that humans display a systematic bias towards cooperation much more so than predicted by games like these.

What this tells us is that if we are put in a position where we can choose to collaborate -- and the benefits of collaboration can be achieved without personal detriment (i.e. we share a common goal) -- then we will inherently choose collaboration.

Fortunately for us, we're never as isolated as the gang members in the prisoners' dilemma and we usually have better choices. However, some of the challenges of our work can lead us to fall into the pursuit of individual reward – just the like the prisoners' dilemma demonstrates. Think about the conditions that the different priorities of the disciplines with whom we all work influence the choices we make.

Consider how the interaction between the following groups occurs, and how each group's priorities can influence the outcome of a project.

- Designers and Project Managers
- Designers and Sub-consultants
- Designers and Clients

If we let them, each one of those relationships can drive us to pursue individual reward instead of finding the common ground which benefits both parties. We need to keep our priorities in mind (i.e. our deliverables) when we are working on our projects to ensure we are not led astray by our own needs. Focussing on self-interest can thwart the collaboration that helps us get the project completed effectively and efficiently.

In order to maintain a focus on participant success we should recognize how collaboration can be influenced by you team if they concentrate solely on individual self-interest. We are not talking about creating a utopian system here. We simply want to recognize that the relationships you built with your team, the trust that grows as a result and the collaboration between the team's participants can thrive when the team understands that personal self-interest (their role, their deliverables) is not their primary focus.

As we move on to the next chapter we will dig a little deeper into what influences our goals of combined participant and project success.

Understand

Why mutual respect and trust are so critical to project success.

Respect and trust are the cornerstones of any relationship. Mutual respect and trust is what we need to ensure is in place in order to achieve a high level of participant and project success. As much as we desire our relationships to be based on mutual respect and trust it isn't always going be that way. While we expect respect to be mutual as a baseline we also recognize building trust takes time just like it takes time to build social currency.

What happens when you expect trust before you've really earned it?

A long time ago when I was still a young designer in this industry I was working on a project for a major music label. We had been working on the design for a new head office in Toronto for a couple of months and were ready to present some ideas to the client. When we presented the design, my boss was having a hard time getting the client to accept a particular idea. After a few attempts he said: "Trust me. We'll make it work." The client immediately shot back: "I'm from L.A. Do you know what 'trust me' means in L.A.?"

F**K YOU!

My boss was fully aware that he didn't yet know our client well enough to expect that level of trust, but he took that risk anyway. We had been working together for a few months, so he felt we had earned a little trust, but as it turned out we had to keep earning it every step of the way.

Our client explained how music executives work and the risks they face in hiring talent. They don't trust anyone very much. It's a challenging, cut-throat business and music executives are cautious and very serious about who they bring on board. One wrong move can make or break their careers. If my boss knew more about their world at the time he may have approached the problem in a different way.

The client was kidding and said so.

We eventually earned their trust and in turn their respect. The project went well and the client loved the resulting design.

Let's take a look at what influences the effective development of each of these cultural values.

Remember the two guys in the prisoner's dilemma.

Before the two gang members were arrested, do you think they respected or trusted each other?

They were part of the same gang, likely were looking for similar outcomes, were like-minded in their needs and most likely worked together before. Sounds like a recipe for success, right?

But gangs operate primarily through fear and intimidation.

And if you're in fear for your livelihood or feel intimidated by your gang or its leadership, what will be foremost on your mind?

Self-preservation.

When you're in a position where you need to make a decision on a course of action, which way will you go?

Self-interest?
Self-sacrifice?
Would you take one for the team? And if you did, would you expect some future benefit to come your way?

Under the circumstances (you are in a gang, after all) self-preservation is the only real way to ensure your survival. It's a basic human instinct. It's part of who we are but fortunately, we are not in criminal gangs. It's still very easy, though, to breed a survival of the fittest attitude if our team members feel like they're unsupported or fear for their livelihood. A lack of support creates an unhealthy competitive environment. It creates a kill-or-be-killed mentality. Respect and trust cannot survive in an environment like that.

In those conditions, everyone succumbs to the natural inclination to protect themselves and their job. Looking out for No. 1 become the focus and drives what they do and the choices they make. Self-preservation dissolves a team based environment and we all know with project work there is always a team, even if it's only the client and a consultant. A project of any size or complexity requires us to collaborate with someone to get positive results.

We all have a job to do, we all want to see results and we need everyone to play their part. Looking out for No. 1 really has no place in the project world yet it is a commonality in many project environments.

Let's explore why that is a bit further.

We're on a team. My piece of a project is different than yours. The basic expectation is that I will deliver on my piece independent of yours and everyone else's. The only way we are going to get the job done is to deliver on our roles, on time and as error-free as possible. Trust and respect are easy to understand in this environment: You do your part, I do mine, we are accountable to the team and everything is good.

Until something goes wrong.

Then what?

Mistakes are part of every project. Mistakes require corrective action, and someone needs to take responsibility for them. That's just the way it is. We isolate the problem, find a way to correct it and move on.

But what about the impact on the team?

We know there are benefits to collaboration, but we also instinctively know to stay out of someone else's problems, right? You can see the problem emerge, you can anticipate the impact and the extra work involved. It's going to affect you even though you did your part. It's then that self-preservation rears its ugly head. We start with the blame game. We complain. We put someone on the spot. It's in those moments that we fall neatly back on our instincts.

We have to find a way to short-circuit that process. How do we move away from the idea of isolating the problem and eliminating it to a place where the problem becomes an opportunity and the team becomes the path to resolution instead of impacting a bunch of self-interest focussed individuals?

Take a look at these two images for a few seconds.

When you compare the rowing team working in unison to the person defending the position of her team alone, which looks better to you? Which **feels** better?

In either scenario it's hard to let the natural inclination for self-preservation go completely. Besides being instinctually reinforced day in and day out, self-preservation is also reinforced by the reason most people work in the first place -- reward and benefit. So it can't ever be eliminated.

But it can be minimized.

And we can shift our focus away from self-preservation.

We can certainly agree that accountability to a team through individual action will get you some respect. We can also conclude that if you deliver on your part and take responsibility for your actions, you will earn trust.

What's still missing though, is the **mutual** part and that's the key ingredient to minimizing the need to fall back on self-interest, self-preservation and the negative impact looking out for No. 1 has in a team based environment.

Determine
What it takes to reinforce mutual respect and trust.

Somehow that rowing team has it right, don't they? They work within an environment where winning requires mutual respect and trust. The rowing team also helps to demonstrate that while collaboration doesn't necessarily **demand** collective or unified behavior when it happens great results can occur.

And getting great results is the key.

- We all **want** our work to feel important to us.
- We all **want** to feel supported, especially when we make a mistake.
- We all **want** to feel like we benefit from our work.

All our wants feed into to another basic human need; to be rewarded for what we do. It's to our benefit to do a good job so that we get rewarded at the end of the day. The reward sits neatly beside self-preservation and the two of them work us over day by day....if we let them.

But isn't that why we work? To be rewarded?

What are the most recognizable rewards to you?

How about these commonly understood rewards:

- Financial
- Praise
- Fame

Do you benefit from a financial reward? Sure. And who doesn't love to be praised for something they've done? And fame, well we all want our Andy Warhol clichéd 15 minutes. These rewards, though enticing, are empty. They are not **mutually beneficial** to your team, nor do any of them build respect or trust.

They can wring out the wrong results – just like in the prisoner's dilemma. They're self-serving; none of them benefit collaboration either. The self-preservation mentality ensures financial reward, praise and fame are the focus, and thus survival of the fittest flourishes. Self-preservation becomes the mandate and the team and project suffers.

Let's take a look at another list.

- Autonomy
- Mastery
- Purpose

Autonomy is inherently individual. In fact, so are mastery and purpose. But when we look deeper into each one of these rewards, the benefits to mutual respect and trust become clear. And it's that **mutual** part where the principles of Partnership, Lessons Learned and Continuous Improvement gain strength and become most effective.

Let's explore each of these **rewards,** and then we'll apply them to establishing our framework for collaborative project delivery.

Autonomy builds confidence.

It allows a team member to make decisions to benefit the results of a project without looking over their shoulder. Autonomy breeds accountability. As freedom opens the door to new ideas, individuals start to feel free to offer insights and improvements without fearing that they'll be judged for their position or role.

Autonomy opens the door to efficiency, deeper thinking and better results because the focus is directed on the task at hand. Your team will worry less about how they are expected to solve the problem and concentrate instead on what is necessary to solve the problem.

Mastery fuels our passion to improve**.**
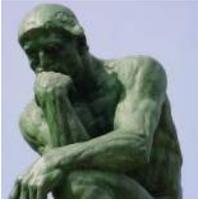

How good are you at what you do? Are you Yoda good?

Malcolm Gladwell, in his book Outliers, spoke about the expert. (His examples were the Beatles and Tiger Woods, both of whom were once undeniably at the top of their game.) Malcolm suggested that 10,000 hours of practice produces the ability to be an expert [4]. So if you work 50 weeks a year, eight hours a day on one thing, it will take you five years to become an expert. No breaks! No rest! Just flat out practice. Can you do it? That's why it takes so darn long to get that good at something.

When I think of mastery, I think of fictional characters like Yoda. But mastery doesn't have to be like that.

Mastery truly is about the day-to-day improvements we can make to get better at what we do. Self-improvement, career advancement and growth are important to us all. Through our work we gain knowledge that helps us look for advancements or innovative ways of doing things. We can only achieve that, though, if we are in a place that promotes, celebrates and creates focus on individual growth that at the same time supports the team.

Purpose is your foundation.

With mastery we posed the question, "How good are you at what you do?"

Now, I really want to know -- why do you do what you do? I would love for you to think about your "why" – what your purpose is. Before we can create a system or a process, or assemble a team we need to consider the "why."

Purpose is very personal, as it should be. Feelings are personal. Passion is personal. Feelings and passions don't always translate to progress, but having them fuels progress. Purpose changes how you see your world. Purpose offers rewards that change how you feel about what you are doing. Satisfaction in knowing you did something or changed something that makes other people happy, more efficient or improves their lives in some way can be very powerful. You have to feel it, and a team can collectively feel purpose through a common vision. Establishing the "why" is the key in creating purpose within a team-based environment.

Autonomy, Mastery and **Purpose** are really great alternatives to money, praise and fame. Each of them allows individuality to flourish but avoid individual self-interest by taking the focus away from the purely self-interested driven rewards. Money, praise and fame become the natural bi-product of your success not the primary reason for you to seek achievement.

Before we move on let's take a quick inventory of where we are.

We know if we establish **social currency** and get to know our people, we **can build trust.**
We know we can **reinforce respect through** learning, sharing knowledge and **sharing accountability**.
We know basic **collaboration** is in our **nature**.
We know **self-preservation is an instinct** that we all bear in our daily lives.
We have seen that just because we **collaborate** doesn't mean we are **a cohesive team**.
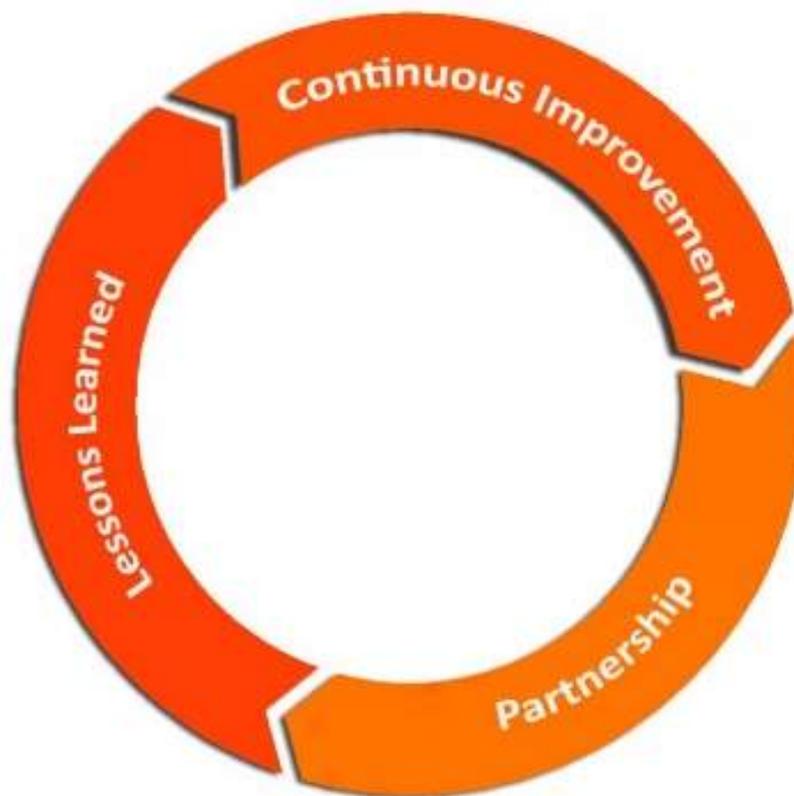We can **change** the nature of what we do by changing **how we look at rewards**.

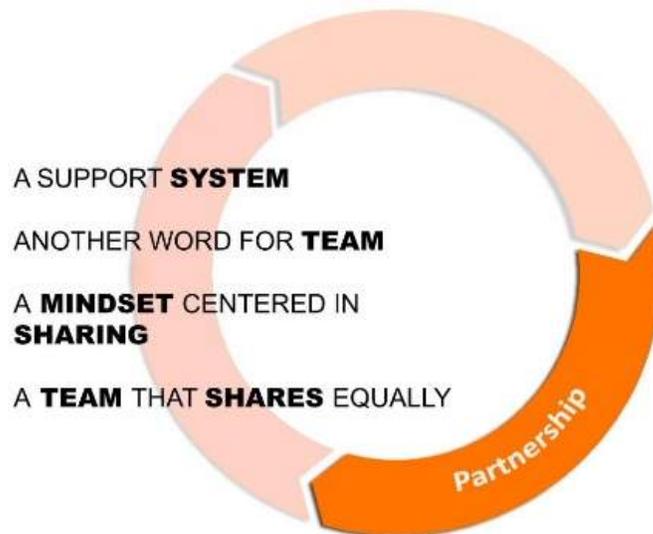Now, let's wrap this up into our process that promotes collaborative project delivery.

Practice
The principles of Partnership, Lessons Learned and Continuous Improvement

As you may have imagined this process is cyclical. Each principle feeds into the next and keeps the circle close and continuous. None of the three can stand on their own hence their interdependent nature. Each has its practical application which relies solely on the team to make it successful.

Partnership is a mindset.

A SUPPORT **SYSTEM**

ANOTHER WORD FOR **TEAM**

A **MINDSET** CENTERED IN **SHARING**

A **TEAM** THAT **SHARES** EQUALLY

Partnership

It's really that simple.

The team shares the ups and downs. We share equally in project successes and failures. Ultimate responsibility starts with my role as the team's leader, but it is maintained **collectively** by the team. I am another member of the team playing my role. That's it. The team relies on each other to complete their mandates.

The **Partnership mindset** does not ignore structure, though -- quite the contrary. Structure is critical to project success; it defines basic roles and responsibilities. It is up to the team to be clear where each team member's role starts and stops. The development and maintenance of each team member's role is **not** mutually exclusive, nor is it dictated from the top down. All team members know their roles and what skills they bring to the team and they are held accountable to grow their skills through experience.

Partnership requires a clear understanding that **no one** team member is more important than another. If one team member is struggling, learning something new or needs assistance with a difficult situation, we share our resources and expertise to help solve the problem. For anyone, for everyone.
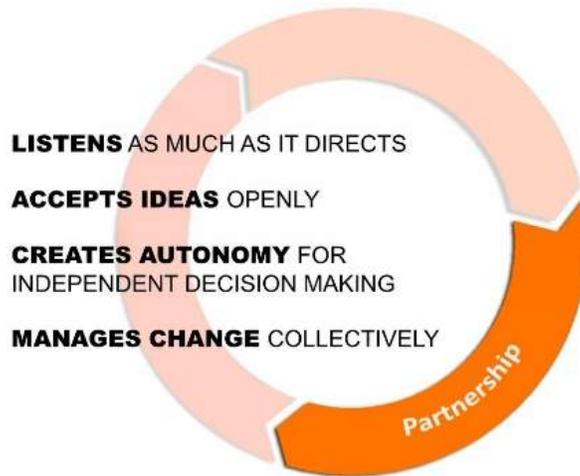
The Partnership mindset is also about communication and sharing information openly.

We share our achievements, but more importantly we share challenges. We trust each other to bring information forward, regardless of its potential impact on the project. When we all share information regularly, the team knows what's happening and can operate securely in the knowledge that everyone is well informed. Everyone knows about changes in policy, process or direction. The Partnership mindset
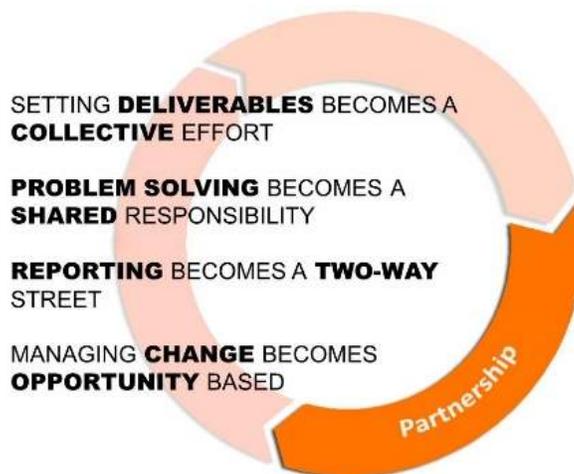
promotes accountability. It creates focus on the critical path. It helps to limit second-guessing and allows the team to do their job. The residual benefit is that the team can focus on its work.

When the team is structured, when each team member's roles and responsibilities are clear, when we help each other – it helps us all in the end, and our clients benefit directly.

Here are a few things that a **partnership mindset** does for a team.

LISTENS AS MUCH AS IT DIRECTS

ACCEPTS IDEAS OPENLY

CREATES AUTONOMY FOR INDEPENDENT DECISION MAKING

MANAGES CHANGE COLLECTIVELY

Partnership

The partnership mindset allows the team to establish clear directives for working together. Each team member, regardless of their role, follows a mutually agreed upon process for delivering their work.

SETTING **DELIVERABLES** BECOMES A **COLLECTIVE** EFFORT

PROBLEM SOLVING BECOMES A **SHARED** RESPONSIBILITY

REPORTING BECOMES A **TWO-WAY** STREET

MANAGING **CHANGE** BECOMES **OPPORTUNITY** BASED

Partnership

Setting deliverables becomes a collective effort.

It creates buy-in which increases accountability.
It streamlines effort by accepting input from a variety of perspectives.
It allows for proactive problem solving – we can anticipate issues before they disrupt the project's path.

Problem solving becomes a shared responsibility.

It promotes efficiency by sharing design impact across the team.
It provides the opportunity for the team to find innovative solutions through cross-discipline input.
It creates opportunity to improve the process by incorporating all team members' input.

Reporting becomes a two-way street.

It eliminates guesswork and promotes consistent communication.
It reinforces accountability with shared input on progress, profitability and deliverables.
It builds mutual respect and trust through 360 degree open feedback and constructive input.

Managing change becomes opportunity based.

It dispels the isolation and elimination attitude (No more "It's your problem, you fix it!")
It promotes shared solutions and collective input to solving a problem.
It promotes the containment of systemic errors by sharing mistakes and solutions openly.

The benefits gained by Partnership can only be maintained if we are all learning from our progress. That brings us to the second principle; Lessons Learned.

Lessons Learned as a process.

Anyone can teach someone else to do something. We have all learned in this traditional format going back as long as we can remember, and that methodology doesn't really change much in the workplace. But it's only effective up to a point. Instruction is necessary for the basics, but after that? Giving instruction is not the best way to learn from your work. Thus, we have developed Lessons Learned as a process that supports the team in its efforts to learn and grow through active participation and evaluating each other's work.
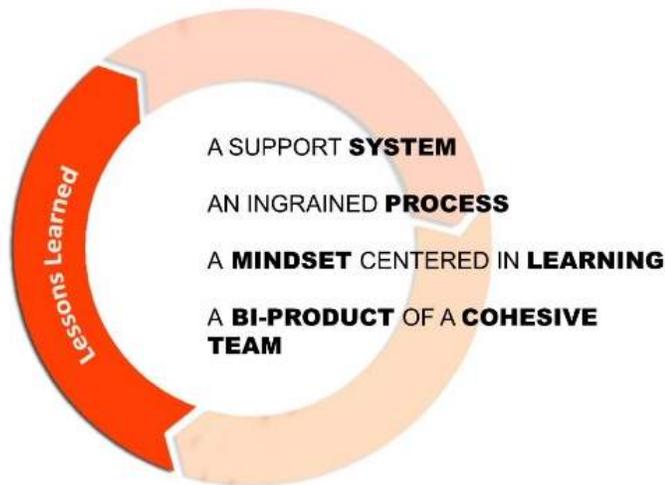
As a by-product of Partnership, we rely on **Lessons Learned** for the **growth** of the team. For this process to be successful, we agree on a few ground rules that manage how we work together. These ground rules all generally say the same thing and we work with each other to ensure we manage these rules collectively. Here's how we promote this mindset.
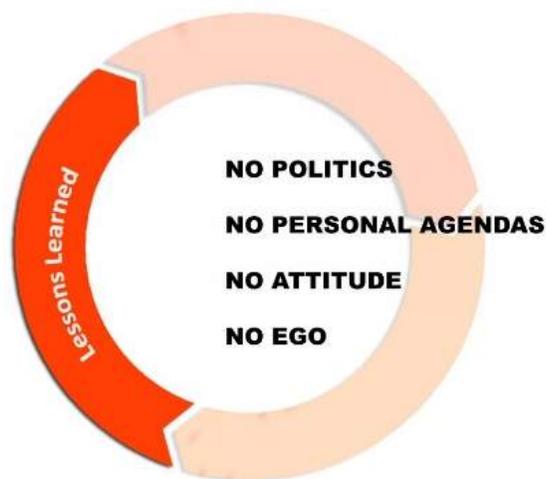
We share our skills, learning and thinking with our team. We conduct monthly lunch meetings to share ideas and information. The monthly forum allows us to bring in some food and start each session as an informal socializing opportunity, which builds that **social currency**.

Each session is structured to address issues from each sector of work. We touch on Project Management, Design, Contract Documentation and Construction Administration issues through each discipline of work. The session is also structured to address changes in standards, present initiatives and gain feedback on best practices from each aspect of the project lifecycle.

Minutes are recorded, and the minutes, links and documentation discussed and examples provided are consolidated in a monthly report that is distributed to each team member by way of a cloud-based tool that allows remote access and updates. The whole team agrees to use that information to look for improvement opportunities, to share those improvements and to streamline their application over the next month.

This leads us to into our third principle, Continuous Improvement.

Continuous Improvement is the glue.

Continuous Improvement is the backbone of the group. Continuous Improvement does all the heavy lifting. Personal growth is an important factor to our individual success. We translate that attitude to the team by sharing functional improvements equally. It makes so much sense to the core of who we are as a team.
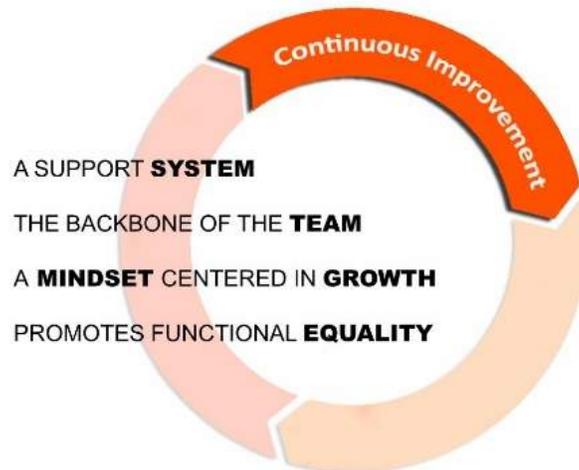
In any project, we use the tools we have to complete our work. When those work well, we use those tools again and again. That's also how to build a cohesive team: Collectively establish a process that works and keep using it. We become exactly what we want from the outset – a well-oiled machine.

So, to recap: We have established a great Partnership, and we are executing our Lessons Learned to ensure that we manage change efficiently. All is good in the world. We start to build efficiency.

But we can start to relax when we are firing on all cylinders. Inherent in this process is a risk that we need to acknowledge.

When I was in high school, my dad worked at General Motors as a maintenance welder. During the summer break he was nice enough to get me a part-time job in the plant in Oshawa. The company promoted student hiring to augment its shift work and offered students a good salary for the summer months. It wasn't glorious work, but it paid well. And there was a saying used by the line workers at GM that played well into the general attitude of the GM employees. It's always stuck with me as an impression of the company.

In a way, that makes sense.

If things are working well, why change anything? But that's where this last principle is so important. When things are going well, we start to rely on process to keep us engaged. We start to forget about **why** we are doing what we are doing and start to focus only on getting the job done. It's that repetitive nature of the routine that we need to beware, lest it let us become complacent and satisfied with things the way they've always been.

*Continuous Improvement means that the **status quo** should never be good enough.*

Kaizen [5] is a Japanese-born system of continuous improvement that encourages all employees to look for small enhancements to improve process. It's primarily used in the manufacturing industry, where repetitive activity is the norm. What the companies who employ this technique realized is that they could make very small enhancements over time that lead to big changes in overall efficiency.

We don't make widgets, obviously, but the analogy is what's important. It's about how we apply this principle of incremental adjustment to what we do. We all understand that we are not looking for radical, sweeping change. Instead, improvement opportunities are more about the little changes we can make to make the process better, easier or more efficient.

Here's how the continuous improvement process works:
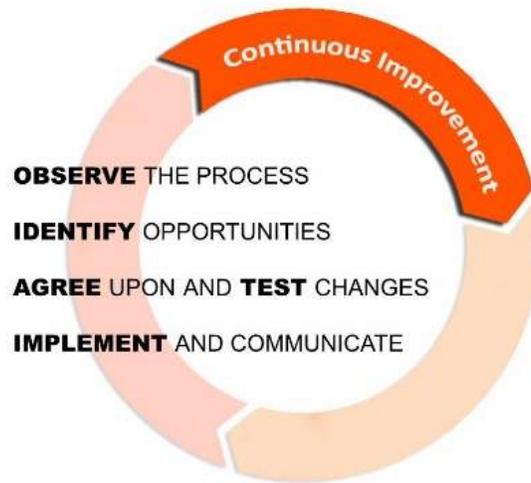
Observe   Always be looking for better ways to do things. It doesn't take any more time, and it reinforces awareness.

Identify   Propose improvements in a cross-team environment. It allows discussion on the impact of those changes from various perspectives.

Agree   Buy-in from all stakeholders is critical to success.

Test   Try it before it gets rolled out. Work out the bugs and bring any issues back to the table.

Implement   Make it happen. Communicate what, why and how impact is expected to improve process.

Ideas are identified by the team during our Lessons Learned forums, discussed as a group, tested and then implemented into our process.

It's really that simple.

This method can work well for big moves, too. We have implemented a significant initiative, full BIM (building information modelling) integration, as a **continuous improvement** opportunity. We started one project at a time. Over a year, through a series of small steps, we created a new process flow, trained our team on the changes in the implementation process and moved forward with full integration.

If your team collectively recognizes the importance of continually looking for better ways to do things, **and** you have a structured method to test and deliver on the new ideas, you are well on your way to leaving the status quo behind.

Thank you!

For letting me share this story with you. It is near and dear to my heart and I believe that any team that wants to take this on will benefit immensely from the process.

The principles of Partnership, Lessons Learned and Continuous Improvement have served my team well over the years. We have become a trusted partner to our clients and have changed the way they engage us. We have been able to demonstrate to our clients that we can consistently deliver high-quality design, efficiently and on time.

We have, over the past few years, decreased change cost to our clients by more than 10%, maintained consistent profitability target growth and have been able to increase significantly the opportunity to get repeat work with our clients. And more importantly, we have a great team that works hard and has fun – which has resulted in very happy clients.

I will leave you with this last quote. It really summed up this process well for me.

Have fun and just go with the flow [6].

If you change the way you look at things the things you look at change.
Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (Chick-sent-me-high)

References and Links:

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