



The Five Energies

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The Five Energies

Rationale

Teams exist in response to a challenge. The challenge may be an opportunity or a threat, and requires the attention, thoughts and actions of more than one person, thereby creating the need for a team.

The challenge, in any given moment, can be expressed as a question:-

- How can we increase the quality of our customer service?
- How can we deliver services to internal clients in a cost-effective manner?
- How can we make this a great place to work?
- How can we ensure everyone on the team knows precisely what is expected of them?

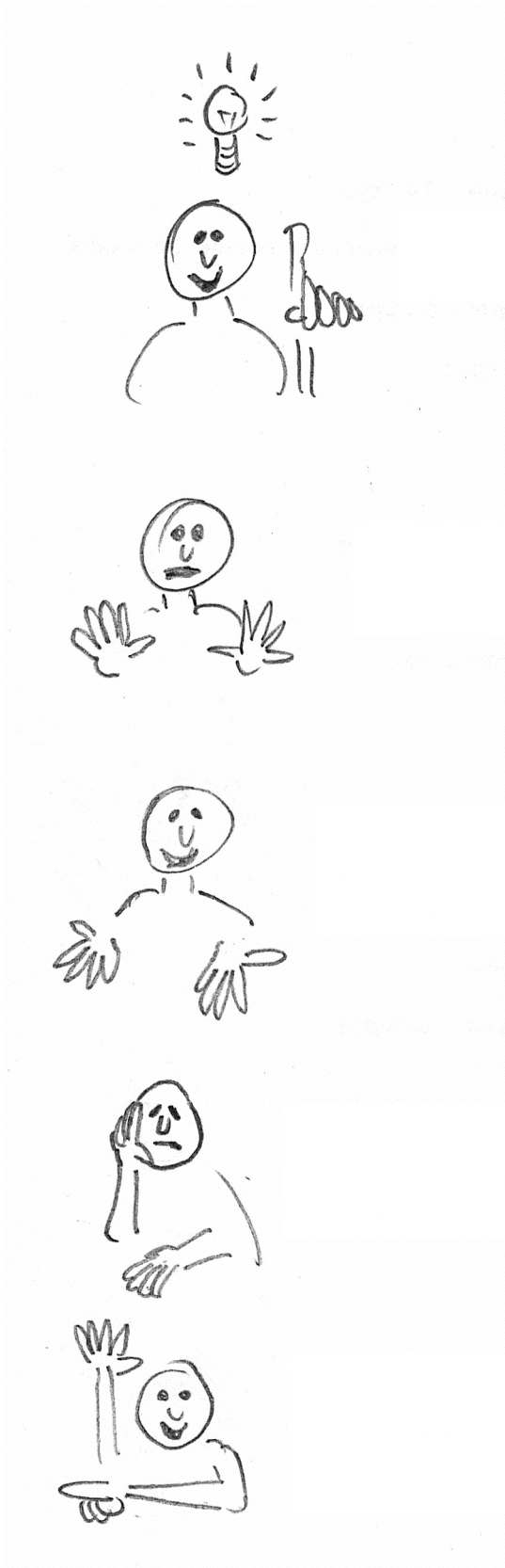
Team members will respond to the question using one of Five Energies:-

- They may *initiate* an answer to the question.
- They may *oppose* the initiation.
- They may *support* the initiation.
- They may *whinge*, which is covert opposition.
- They may *derail*, which is to shift the focus away from the question at hand.

Discussion in team meetings consists entirely of initiating, opposing, supporting, whinging and derailing. This continues until, ideally, the team agrees on an answer. Then the team is aligned and can move to the next question. Without agreement or alignment the energy of the team is diffused which limits effectiveness and satisfaction.

The patterns of initiating, opposing, supporting, whinging and derailing mostly go unnoticed. In some cases, it simply looks like a discussion. At other times all people see is chaos. By being aware of the patterns of energetic contribution, individuals can make conscious choices about how they can serve the team's purpose by making constructive contributions. In addition, leaders in the team can make choices that channel the energies of the team towards better outcomes that are owned by all.

The Five Energies



Initiating

Opposing

Supporting

Whinging

Derailing

The Five Energies – appearance, upside and downside

Initiating		
<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Value-creating</i>	<i>Value-destroying</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiates new ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moves the group forward, in thought and action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can miss opportunities to move into action or listen to others • Excessive initiation may prevent completion
Opposing		
<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Value-creating</i>	<i>Value-destroying</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provides overt opposition; very visible • Blocks initiation with reason or by the force of their personality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality control • May be applying standards or values to the team • Initiation may lack ethics or reason 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stops ideas moving forward • May discourage further initiation
Supporting		
<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Value-creating</i>	<i>Value-destroying</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supports the initiator • Offers no original ideas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helping encourages initiation • Creates positive feeling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tendency towards being a “yes-man” (or woman) • May be political and self-serving
Whinging		
<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Value-creating</i>	<i>Value-destroying</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does not overtly support or oppose • Passive resistance in the face of powerlessness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of little value to the process • Provides a voice for the powerless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drains the team of energy • Brings the focus back to themselves • Creates ill-feeling
Derailing		
<i>Behaviour</i>	<i>Value-creating</i>	<i>Value-destroying</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Derails the process with unrelated issues or actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circuit breaker; relieves the tension • Sometimes humorous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time waster • Devious • Can be self-serving.

Team Terminology

Overview

This work is about identifying the shifts in team agendas by appreciating how language reflects the key questions that the team needs to answer in order to find alignment. Deconstructing language is often more art than science, as people sometimes use different words to describe the same thing, and sometimes, the same words to describe different things.

Rationale

Terms such as *Purpose*, *Vision*, *Mission Statement*, *Strategy*, *Values* and *Culture* are often used in business communications. Sometimes they are meaningful. Many times they are not. (The mission statement of *McDonalds* is almost the identical to that of the *CIA*.) If these words are to be meaningful, they need to be connected to the actual motivations, aspirations, imaginations and actions of the people whose activity there are intended to guide.

It is possible to find the meaning in these terms when they accurately reflect a set of fundamental questions that are present for every team. Where we find meaning, we sow the seeds for action. When we create shared meaning, through seeking true answers to these questions, we create our future.

The performance of a team improves when the answers to the key questions are:-

- a) Genuine. Team members are overt and authentic in the way they answer the question
- b) Genuinely shared by all. There are no overt or covert disagreements that dilute the energy of the team.

To streamline this framework we have reduced the myriad of questions facing the team to four; *Why? Where? What? How?* (Sometimes fewer words are better than more.) Each question can be articulated many ways, however each has a defining energy, and discovering this is what this work is about.

Why?

- Why does this team exist?
- Why are we doing this?
- Why does this challenge need to be met?

The answer to this question may be called **the Purpose, the Reason, the Rationale, the Need, the Raison d'être, the driving force** and it generally establishes the motivation for people. It may be shared intellectually or emotionally. People have more energy to meet the challenge when they have a strong answer to the question "Why am I doing this?"

Where?

- Where do we want to be when the challenge has been met?

- What does our destination look like? What has been achieved?
- Where are we headed?

The answer to this question may be called **the Goal, the Vision, the Objective, the Outcome, the future state, the destination, etc.** It may take the form of:-

- A physical destination – for example, China, the summit, the beach (less relevant to business teams but important for travelers)
- A financial target, or indeed any measurable business deliverable – growth, revenue, customer satisfaction, rise in share price
- A state of being, such as having things under control with “all the balls in the air”, or achieving a sense of strong engagement between team, members and customers, or achieving successful integration and implementation of a new software-driven process.

The likelihood of achieving success with any endeavour:-

- Increases dramatically when everyone on the team provides the same answer to the question “Where are we headed?”
- Decreases if reaching this destination does not serve the “why” question; if reaching the destination does not serve the purpose.

What?

- What needs to be done to get from where we are now to where we want to be?
- Specifically, who is going to do what, and to what standard, and by when?
- What are the tasks, milestones, interdependencies, contingencies, critical paths?

The answer to this question may be called **the Strategy, the Plan, the Task List, the Actions**, etc. These are things that have to be done in order to get to where we want to go; to achieve the vision. They may be events, processes or conversations; the design of an experience, the production of a product, the testing of user acceptance, the writing of a report or the reading of it. These are often highly visible and quantitatively measurable:-

- What was actually done?
- What amount of time was spent on the tasks?
- What steps were followed?
- How often were certain words used?

Often in the face of challenges, people feel the need to go into action. They either start doing something or, if time permits, they talk about what will or should be done. If everyone implicitly agrees on the vision or the goal, there is no need to ask the question – *where are we headed?* If there are unresolved disagreements in team members’ views about the destination, or *why* they are doing this anyway, it will be difficult to achieve success.

How?

- How do we choose to operate together?

- How will we relate to one another as we travel towards our destination?
- How does it feel to be working in this team?

The answer to this question is called **the Culture, the Values, the Ethos, the Operating Principles, the Agreements, etc.** Agreement around *the how* sets the rules of engagement for the team, and is about accommodating and leveraging diversity. Common sense suggests that the team culture should support the achievement of the objective. If team members can set their own rules of engagement - create their own culture - they should do this with respect to their purpose, vision and strategy.

At the level of the individuals in the team, this is where professional and personal agendas intertwine. The professional agenda is to create an environment that enables the team to effectively execute their actions and achieve the objective. The personal agenda is about pleasure - *Do I enjoy working in this way?*- and integrity – *Does what I'm doing sit well with my values?* For some people they are one and the same. For others the distinction may be defining – *I endure this dangerous and unpleasant job because this is how I do good in the world.*

The why, the where, the what and the how are clearly related. While it may seem to be a very linear model for describing the terms that drive the team's performance, using this insight can be a very intuitive, non-linear experience. In practice, connected leaders will sense if their team is aligned or whether they need to intervene to address divergent agendas. If the latter is required, the leader can choose to simply ask the appropriate question. For example (and as the case may be):-

- *Do we agree that this is how we'll operate together?*
- *Are we clear on what needs to be done?*
- *Do we have a common view on where we need to be?*
- *Have we agreed on why we need to do this?*

Creative Intervention

Overview

This work reveals the choices leaders in a team can make to keep the energy of the team driving towards successful outcomes. These are practical, supporting choices that be made whether you are the designated leader or a team member with the capacity for leadership.

Rationale

As we have established with the Five Energies™ there is a finite number of energetic responses to any question. With only five responses to the questions that teams face, we can practice some tried and tested strategies to keep people engaged and the team flowing towards an aligned conclusion.

If they...	You can...
Initiate	Acknowledge, support or oppose
Oppose	Dialogue
Support	Acknowledge, test or nudge
Whinge	Attend
Derail	Align

Creative Interventions

Acknowledging the initiation

- Initiation is essential and also risky for the person initiating. Reinforce their creativity by acknowledging the offer
- If you think it's a good idea, support it
- If you think it's not a good idea, oppose it – simply, clearly and directly. Then indicate that you are open to dialogue.

Dealing with *opposition* ... have *Dialogue* with them

There are many approaches to handling opposing views creatively and collaboratively, however, all have a similar theme of *being open to another's perspective without losing contact with your own*, and *working with* the person opposing rather than *against them* or *over the top of them*.

- You have a view. They have a view. Find out what their view is and what their reasoning is and work with this in a way that may lead to a better solution.
- If you want to work with the person opposing, you will want to go beyond merely the words they are saying or the position they seem to be holding. Be open to their reasoning or their perspective on the situation.
- Take the time to listen to what they have to say. Include their reality and build on it. Be willing to say “yes, *and...*”.
- Ask yourself if you have given the other person enough space and time to express their view fully. Have you given them time enough to arrive at the end of their process?
- Learn to live with the struggle of true collaboration. Let go of your impatience. Allow a more creative solution the chance to emerge.

Making the most of *Support*

- Support can be a thankless contribution. Let the person know that their support noted and appreciated. This will reward their generosity and keep them engaged
- To ensure the support is not merely political or approval seeking, *test it*. Simply ask; *What about this idea do you like?* If the support is genuine, they will have an answer.
- To encourage a richer array of initiation, or to make the idea better or more specific, give them a *nudge*. Ask: *How can we make this work better? What needs to be done so that this idea is applicable in your space?*

Dealing with the person *Whinging...* Attend to them

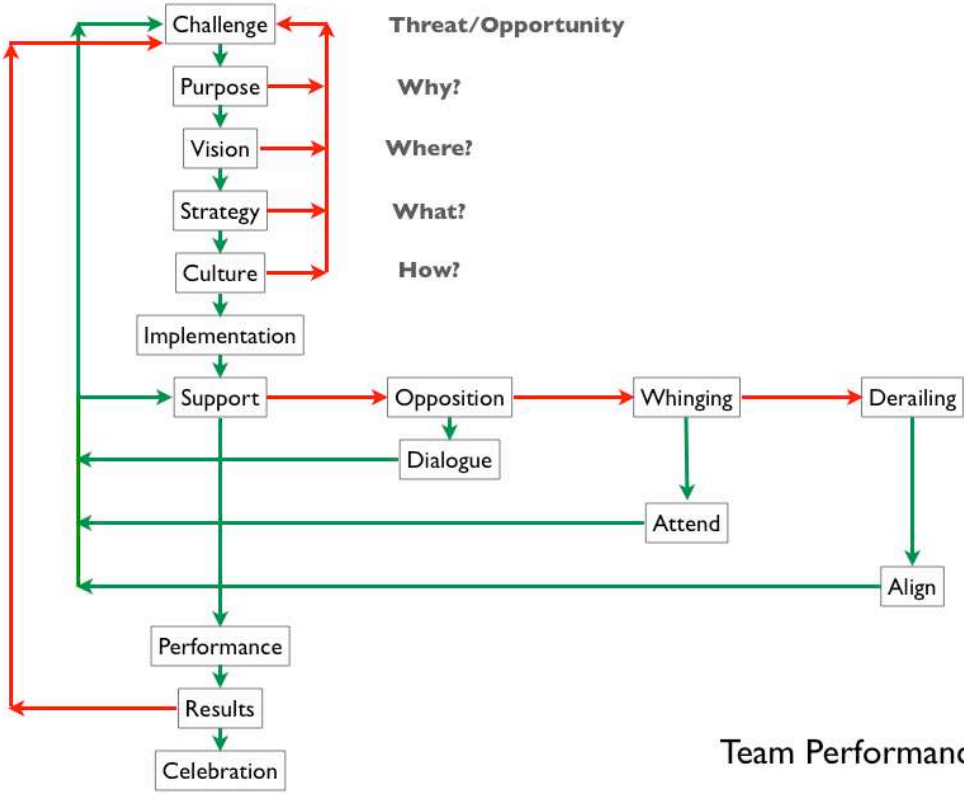
- Find out what is going on for them.
- Their decision to remain covert springs from a sense of powerlessness. Find a way to resolve this to bring their concerns into view.
- What are their needs and concerns, or their anxieties and difficulties?
- What is their view of the needs and concerns of others affected by the situation?

- Ask¹ general questions that encourage them to open up; eg, *How do you see the situation?*
- Ask specific questions that help to clarify their view; eg, *Are you saying that the question hasn't been properly defined?*
- If they say, *I can't ask What happens if you do?*
- If they say, *It always happens like this...* ask *Are there any circumstances when it doesn't?*
- Don't ignore or deny their feelings. Indeed check that you are accurately reading their emotions; *You seem disappointed. Is that right?*
- If you succeed in bringing them into overt opposition, they may be highly charged, appearing aggressive or angry. Keep your centre, actively listen and continue the dialogue. Keep the dialogue going, noticing if the other person has withdrawn. Encourage them.
- Don't take agro personally.
- Allow silences.

Dealing with the derailer ... Align them

- Give them the opportunity to acknowledge what they are doing. Ask; *How does this serve the purpose?* Give them the space to answer.
- If necessary, remind them of the purpose and any commitments they may have made in relation to the purpose. Refer to any written plans or agreements in a direct and matter-of-fact manner.
- Be prepared for the derailer to move into another mode and respond accordingly. If derailing (covert opposition) has been their choice, look out for whinging. It may take some attention, but if they end up opposing, encourage them to continue being overt.
- It may be that the derailing was intended as a humorous and minor diversion. Don't hold a grudge. Acknowledge them when they move into a more creative and overt mode.

The Team Flowchart



Team Performance Flowchart