

The Leadership ABCs Worksheet

What we know about groups

Research shows that groups, including medical teams, often experience dysfunctions as they work together. There are many reasons for this but some of the most common causes include:

- Poor communication where information is misinterpreted or not shared clearly
- Ambiguous KPIs or goals where criteria are vague or timeframes not specified
- Changing group membership where new personalities disrupt the group dynamic
- External factors and demands from patients, suppliers, clients or regulators

Additionally, under stress and time pressure, these risks can become magnified. Yet you as the leader of your practice or work area need people to work smoothly, flexibly and adaptively to achieve the best patient outcomes.

Research from Healthcare

Team and group effectiveness in medical settings is particularly prone to dysfunction given the nature of the work, where procedures are complex and errors can have serious consequences on patient wellbeing. In these situations, the quality of leadership – that is, your ability to effectively direct others – is the critical factor in avoiding group dysfunctions. Leadership expert Professor Amy Edmondson at Harvard has studied group dynamics in the medical context for many years and found:

- Groups with identical hierarchies can perform statistically differently from each other
- The key differentiator is Psychological Safety that allows open, non-judgmental challenge
- The role of the leader in creating this joint problem-solving orientation is essential

Yet as she says: *“Human nature makes the right behaviors really hard”*, meaning that in the absence of focused and deliberate leadership, dysfunctions and disconnects are likely to occur, leading to lower performance and more mistakes.

The ABC Model

Behavioral science research shows that in all workplaces people have 3 psychological needs

- Autonomy
- Belonging
- Competence

It is the role of the leader to ensure these core needs are met for all members of the group. The ABC model offers leadership actions that ensure this happens.



Source: O'Connor K. & Stern S. LBS 2023

Explanation

Autonomy

The Problem

Low autonomy causes disengagement, low productivity and poor performance in groups

What is Needed

People need "*freedom within a frame*" so they can define some tasks and processes themselves

Why this is Hard

Micromanagement is the norm in controlled, high risk and closely regulated environments

Belonging

The Problem

Without strong connections to others and to meaningful work, people are isolated and exposed

What is Needed

A clear group identity will link people to a higher mission and shared values

Why this is Hard

Most working groups lack time to create their identity and lack focus to explore their vision

Competence

The Problem

When people lack the skills for their work, performance tends to suffer and mistakes occur

What is Needed

Basic skills are essential, but aligning people's strengths to tasks can also accelerate performance

Why this is Hard

In technical and medical environments, tight rules and protocols can often stifle development

Actions you can take

To move from the "problem" state to providing "what is needed", here is what you can do as a leader:

- Look for where you can allow "*freedom in the frame*" to enhance people's autonomy
- Take time and be curious about creating an identity or brand for your working group
- Go further to define a shared vision or higher order ambition that everyone can feel connected to
- Get to know your people well enough, provide the right training, and play to people's strengths
- Create an environment for development in your practice where increased competence is the goal

Key takeaways

- Research shows people all have similar basic needs at work
- The role of the leader is to meet those needs on a person by person basis
- There are simple actions you can take to begin meeting these goals
- There will always be factor you can't control but "*freedom within a frame*" can open possibilities

Questions for reflection

- How effective are you in creating ABCs in your current role as a leader?
- How well do you know your people and their personal needs?
- Is there a shared context you could develop so everyone feels connected (a clinic, a specialty)?
- Do you have a group identity that could be further strengthened and "*branded*"?
- How could more sharing of ABC needs strengthen the group and your own leadership power?
- What could be possible of you were fully delivering on the ABCs as a leader?