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The 'I's in team:: The importance of individual members to team success

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"There were eleven votes for guilty. It's not so easy for me to raise my hand and send a boy off to die without talking about it first."

Juror 8 (Henry Fonda), in the movie "12 Angry Men"

Nowhere is the importance of an 'I' in a group or team setting more apparent than in the highly acclaimed movie, "12 Angry Men" starring Henry Fonda, Lee J. Cobb and a host of distinguished supporting actors. Set in a New York City courthouse, the drama involves the case of a teenage boy accused of stabbing his father to death. If convicted, he will be sentenced to death. As the movie unfolds, the viewer becomes acutely aware that the jurors have already decided without discussion that the accused is guilty as charged. . . all, that is, except for juror 8 (Henry Fonda), the only "not guilty" vote in the initial tally. The rest of the movie highlights how one "I" in this particular group, through reason and persuasive argument, is able to eventually convince the remaining jurors of the lack of evidence to judge the accused guilty. An explanation for *why* the group's gradual change of decision course over time and ultimate team "success" occurred can be found in a number of exciting new directions in group research and practice.

Groups comprise a necessary structural element of modern organizations since they allow for the combination of resources toward accomplishing complex tasks that no single person can achieve alone. In his 1950 industrial sociological masterpiece, *The Human Group*, George Homans mentions that the only historical continuity for humans over time in society is that of small groups. More recently, in a 2013 study involving 831 companies from across the globe, Ernst and Young confirmed that the use of groups in organizations is alive and well, reporting that employees across industries spent an average of 54% of their day in a team setting with the highest percentage coming from China (64.8%) and the lowest from South Africa (47%). Workers in the United States spent 51.4% of their day in team settings. This trend has been partially driven by the increase in

communication technology allowing firms to virtually connect employees across continents. In 2012, a poll by SHRM showed that 46% of organizations use virtual teams, including 66% of organizations based outside the United States. Scholars and practitioners alike expect this already significant percentage to continue to grow in the future.

However, despite their growing use, teams do not always perform in a manner deserving of their integral role to organizations. To investigate *why* this is, organizational researchers generally explore team effectiveness by searching for team characteristics that can either help teams perform effectively in a variety of contexts, or hinder them from doing so. This research usually operates under the assumption that team properties emerge as consensual, collective dimensions of the team itself. Part of the reason for this is because emergent group properties have been shown to relate to a variety of team processes and outcomes. For example, a host of research has found that teams who have high collective efficacy, or are more confident in their abilities to succeed, perform better across a wide range of tasks. Teams that are perceived as more psychologically safe have been found to adapt to new environments more quickly and perform better. Cohesive teams generally have higher member participation in activities and more compliance with group norms. Finally, teams are often described in terms of their overall level of satisfaction, level of competition, or commitment to the task at hand.

Yet, consider again the quote presented at the beginning of this article by the Henry Fonda character in *12 Angry Men*. This character provides an explicit example of one team member "successfully" changing the attitudes and behavior of an entire team. In this case, the jury he is a part of changes their verdict from a death sentence to not guilty because a sole juror has the integrity, sense of justice, persistence and courage to go against the crowd and fight for a fair deliberation. Interestingly, if you were to assess the jury at the group

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level, you would find that the group strongly believed in the guilt of the suspect. Based on this assessment you may falsely conclude that a jury in which 92% of the members initially believe in the guilt of the suspect is likely to send that individual to his death. It is only by exploring the pattern of individual attitudes and behavioral interactions that an observer may begin to conclude that the jury may find the suspect not guilty. Although fictional, this situation closely mirrors real life examples of single individuals courageous enough to speak out in an attempt to make larger collectives act with greater integrity.

THE CASE OF A REAL LIFE HERO: U.S. SENATOR EDMUND G. ROSS

After the tragic assassination of President Abraham Lincoln on April 14, 1865, his successor, then Vice President Andrew Johnson was left with the monumental and onerous task of undertaking Lincoln's truly humanitarian reconciliation policies with the defeated Confederacy. While a man of significant courage, Johnson was the only Southern Member of Congress to refuse to secede from the Union with his State (Tennessee), he was not nearly as dynamic and persuasive a personality as Lincoln. As a result, in the bloody aftermath of the Civil War, Johnson was continuously at odds with the Radical Republican-dominated Congress, vetoing a number of bills as not only unconstitutional, but much too harsh in their proposed treatment of the Post-War South. As a result, and for the first time in our nation's history, important legislation was passed over a President's veto, thus becoming the law of the land without President Johnson's support. It must be noted that not all of Andrew Johnson's vetoes were overturned and the congressional Radical Republicans soon realized that only the impeachment of President Johnson would provide them total victory. However, getting the two-thirds majority vote necessary for impeachment was highly problematic. More specifically, the success of their endeavor rested squarely on the vote of one man, first-term Kansas Senator, Edmund G. Ross.

That impeachment would come down to the vote of Ross was quite ironic as Ross had to date been a staunch supporter of the Radical Republican agenda, voting for all of their previous legislative measures. In addition, Ross was from Kansas, which along with Massachusetts was arguably the most anti-Johnson state in the country. Furthermore, his colleague from Kansas, Senator Samuel C. Pomeroy, was one of the most strident (and vocal) opponents of Johnson. Through all this, Ross remained tight-lipped on how he would vote on impeachment, adding further drama to an already extremely tense situation. How much interest were the impending impeachment procedures generating? Well, like any hit Broadway show, the impeachment tickets printed for admission to the Senate galleries were a hot commodity and the then fifty-four United States Senators were deluged with requests for them.

On the morning of the vote, Ross was threatened with political death by several colleagues if he dared vote for President Andrew Johnson's acquittal. As the impeachment vote commenced, it became clear that Ross's vote was, in fact, the pivotal one. In a voice that was both strong and unmistakable, Ross voted "Not guilty" and President Johnson

was acquitted. Ross paid a very heavy price for his courage. His every behavior was minutely scrutinized and he was accused of various supposed improprieties. Of course, his political career was over and when he returned to Kansas after his term was completed both he and his family were subjected to a continuous barrage of social ostracism and physical confrontation. Ross later poignantly described how he felt after his dramatic and courageous vote in noting, "...I almost literally looked down into my open grave..." Without the "happy" Hollywood ending, Ross was a real-life counterpart to the Henry Fonda character.

MODERN DAY HEROES: WHISTLEBLOWING AT ELI LILLY

As a more recent case in point of the role of "I" in Team, Robert Rudolph who, in the largest pharma whistleblowing case in United States history, went to a group of fellow sales representatives with evidence that Eli Lilly was illegally marketing the drug Zyprexa for uses that were not approved by the Food and Drug Administration, predominantly the treatment of dementia in the elderly. He was able to gather other representatives to file lawsuits against the company. The \$1.4 billion settlement from Eli Lilly included the largest criminal fine to date for an individual corporation. Rudolph, along with fellow whistleblowers Joseph Faltaous, Steven Woodward, and Jaydeen Vincente shared nearly \$79 million. Thus, unlike many whistleblowers, Rudolph received a measure of vindication. Like almost all whistleblowers, Rudolph paid a severe cost on his road to vindication. During the seven years after he raised his hand at a Lilly district sales meeting in Sacramento, California in January, 2002, Rudolph was rudely and consistently ostracized by his colleagues, resulting in his depression and ultimately forced out of his well-paying job. However, Edmund Ross and Robert Rudolph are two examples that one individual (the "I") can make a difference. Even more importantly, a growing number of executives such as Mark Carney, Governor of the Bank of England concur. In a recent speech to Ivey Business students at the University of Western Ontario, Carney noted that his "...Employees need a sense of broader purpose, grounded in strong connections to their clients and communities." Like Carney, industry-level data supports the idea that the leaders of many high-level professional teams believe that one team member can greatly impact team processes and performance.

IMPLICIT ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF 'I'S: FREE AGENCY IN SPORTS

The most salient example of the underlying confidence businesses have in the importance of individuals to team performance may occur in professional sports. Consider that in the 2014 NBA offseason, despite strict salary caps, teams committed just above a whopping \$600 million to the signing of free agents from other franchises. Additionally, Major League Baseball teams spent \$2.0 billion on free agents during the 2013 offseason, slightly less than the \$2.3 billion that European soccer clubs spent on free agent players during their

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