Mind Tools Expert Voices Episode 3: What Makes a Great Team Now?

Transcript

Rachel Salaman 00:06
Hello and welcome to the Mind Tools Expert Voices podcast. I'm Rachel Salaman…

Jonathan Hancock 00:13
… I'm Jonathan Hancock… and in this episode we're asking: what makes a great team now? Lots has changed in the world of work over the last few years. But some aspects of working with others **never** change. So what are the secrets of putting together an effective team today? And then, how do you thrive?

Rachel Salaman 00:32
Yes. As host of the Mind Tools Expert Interview audio collection, I've talked to hundreds of experts over the last 16 years. And, in this episode, we'll once again be mining those archives to get the thoughts of some of our guests from their different areas of expertise. They'll give us insights and advice about the challenges of building, leading and working in teams – and how to overcome them.

Jonathan Hancock 00:58
I'll focus on how you choose which teams to apply to… the secrets of working well with others… and tips for personal success as part of a high-achieving team.

Rachel Salaman 01:09
And I'll be looking at teams from the perspective of those who put them together. How do you know who's going to be the right fit? Should you even be looking for obvious fit? And, when the people are in place, what will help them perform well together?

Jonathan Hancock 01:24
Well, Rachel, we've both worked on a variety of teams over the years, as well as teaming up here at Mind Tools of course. So I'm sure we'll have our own stories to share. And we'll explain how **anyone** can get their ideas and experiences into our podcast.

Rachel Salaman 01:38
Absolutely. Because teamworking is, of course, something that almost everyone does, at one time or another. So let's start by looking at this from the manager's point of view. What does it take to put together a great team today?

Well, as I was listening back to the experts in our Expert Interview collection, several distinct stages emerged. The first, of course, is hiring the right people for the job. And even before you advertise, you need to figure out what you actually **need**. Now, Elizabeth Marx had some good advice for this. She's a recruitment expert and consultant, and she wrote a book called "The Power of Global Teams: driving growth and innovation in a fast-changing world." She says that team leaders and hiring managers often make particular mistakes. And these are easily fixed – if you think about them.

Elisabeth Marx 02:40
They very often look at replacements. So they look at: "We want to have someone we had before because it personally worked very well." But actually, the key thing is to look strategically. What does the company need at this point in time? You need to look future oriented – what does the company need to achieve? – and then work backwards. And to be very clear on the priority of the business competencies, and how that role produces value in the organization in the future.

Jonathan Hancock 03:09
Do you know what Rachel, I'm sure I was guilty of that when I was once trying to hire somebody, actually, for a team. We were in a school, and we were looking to hire somebody for the maintenance team. And I'm sure we did what Elizabeth said you shouldn't do there – which is try and get a replacement that's kind of like-for-like, because one person has left. But actually things had moved on quite a bit in the team and in the school. What we needed. I think, looking back now with the benefit of hindsight… what we needed was somebody who had rather different skills. It was suddenly a more complicated role. It had different aspects to it, and also a kind of different set of values, I think, were in the school at the time. So actually we did the **wrong** thing to try and look for the same person. I mean, the person we chose was great, actually, in the end… but I'm sure if we'd gone in thinking, "What does the team need **now**?" it would have saved us a lot of hassle, and would have just eased that whole process, I think. Because teams change, don't they? And so you can't just replace like for like.

Rachel Salaman 04:06
Yes. It just takes that little bit of extra thought before you even start putting together the wording for your advert. Are there any particular qualities you think that people might need to look for in a virtual team member?

Jonathan Hancock 04:20
For a virtual team? Well, I suppose you need pretty good technical skills…. and a good internet connection! You need to at least be prepared to learn the technical side of it. I would say after that… it really depends what the team has got to do: what sort of sector you're in, what kind of company, what kind of team it is. But definitely get your internet sorted out, and be prepared to learn the tech and learn some new ways of working. Because I've found that virtual team working is actually quite different in lots of respects from working face to face.

Rachel Salaman 04:48
Yeah. So I suppose versatility is another important skill. Well, I talked to consultant Yael Zofi about her book "A Manager's Guide to Virtual Teams." She rattled off a list of what you might want to look for if you're putting together a virtual team – including some interesting insight into introverts and extroverts. That's something that often comes up when people talk about virtual teams. So here she is – with that list of attributes that hiring managers might want to focus on.

Yael Zofi 05:19
"Self-starter," for one: somebody who's adaptable to change, comfortable with autonomy, able to deliver on time, can work on some complex problems and technical issues, enjoys being involved with team projects, and has the interpersonal skills to build relationships with others, and can share knowledge and ideas. What was interesting is that… you'd think that somebody who is more of an

introvert, or somebody who prefers to work alone, is a better team member in a virtual environment, because they would be more comfortable being on their own.

On the contrary, actually. A lot more of the research shows that those who prefer to work with others – more of the extroverts – seem to be effective as virtual team members, because they (and actually a lot of the managers, most of the managers I interviewed)… they prefer team members who enjoy "initiating," who seek to communicate – reach out when there's a problem. So that's why I found more that the extroverted personality's a desirable quality. That doesn't mean that if somebody is an introvert, they won't be successful. They can be extremely successful in the virtual environment. [However] they would need to make some steps or have a team process for making sure that they communicate and let others know what they're up to. Because it's very easy to get lost in the virtual environment. So you need to initiate.

Rachel Salaman 06:49
That idea of getting lost in the virtual environment: just a throwaway comment at the end there from Yael, but I bet that comes up in your clips about team members experiences.

Jonathan Hancock 06:59
Yeah, it does. I think that is quite an important theme on both sides. And I think that's a really key thing she said there about introverts not necessarily finding it that easy in virtual teams. Maybe that was what people thought when we first moved into this virtual world of teamworking. But definitely don't assume that you have to be introverted. If anything, I think these days you have to have your energy high and be prepared to deal with quite complicated interpersonal situations. And I think tapping into your extroversion is really important, at least some of the time; to be prepared to give that bit a go.

Rachel Salaman 07:33
Yes, absolutely, really interesting point. So if a manager is making it a checklist for their ideal team member, whether or not they consciously realize it, they're probably looking for someone who will fit in. I spoke to the veteran recruiter Lou Adler, who's the author of "Hire With Your Head." And he thinks "hiring for fit" is absolutely essential. He talks about three kinds of fit actually.

Lou Adler 08:00
The personality piece is not unimportant. It's just not a driver for success. So job fit is critical. Team fit is also part of it, which is the personality: hey, you've got to work with the team, you've got to be able to work with other departments, other functions, people within your team. So there's a team-fit component as well. So where personality comes together, can you communicate? So I think that comes together. Another key component is what I call managerial fit. A huge component is: is the hiring manager's style of managing consistent with that new employee's preferences and needs?

Rachel Salaman 08:35
Listening to Lou there, Jonathan, I did wonder how the idea of "fit" sits with the idea of diversity. Because if you always choose people who fit, they're unlikely to be very different from the rest of the team. And I was actually reminded of another book that we covered in our Book Insight collection of audio reviews. It's "The Diversity Bonus" by Scott E. Page. And in that he was very interesting on this. He said that if everybody on the team is doing exactly the same thing – so, for example, if they're on a

production line making a car – diversity doesn't really matter, beyond just general ideas of inclusion. Whereas there are other kinds of team where diversity makes an enormous difference, because it expands the scope and the reach and the potential and the creativity of that team in a way that will lead to greater success.

Jonathan Hancock 09:33
Yeah, and as we've said before, on this podcast, diversity comes in many shapes and sizes, and there are lots of layers to diversity, too. So I guess it's about being as open as you can to **everything** that people might have to offer to the team. Actually, I can recommend a Mind Tools article about that, called "Cultural Fit and Cultural Add." Have a look for that at mindtools.com.

Also, Rachel, we're just about to publish your interview with Emily Ladau, a disability rights advocate, who I know is very strong about seeing what everyone might bring to the table – and about the opportunities that you open up when you really start to take people's individual needs into account – and obviously that's right from recruitment onwards.

Rachel Salaman 10:15
So if we go back to our process of recruiting a great team, we now come to the interview bit. I always dread job interviews myself, because I don't think I'm very good at them. But some kind of interview is unavoidable, whether it's face to face or via video call. And there were some quite unusual interview tips in our archives. Here's one from Dana Borowka. He's the co-author of a book called "Cracking the Personality Code."

Dana Borowka 10:44
It's really helpful to have candidates (towards the end of the interview process; so maybe the second or third meeting)… to draw a pie chart – a couple of pie charts – as to what their last position looked like as far as how time was carved out – in a typical month, and then also for this particular position, the new position: how they perceive time being drawn out in a typical month once they settle down [in the] position. So an example would be, let's say, a company is hiring a sales manager. And in their old position they put down [that] 40 percent of their time was spent on administrative activity, and the new position is requiring only 15 or 20 percent. And the person goes, "Wow, I know I really enjoyed the 40 percent of time spent on that – it was just a lot of fun." Now, then probably it's a good area to probe into a little further to see why they have a need for that, or why they enjoy that. They might be unhappy campers if they're only doing 15 or 20 percent of their time in that area.

Rachel Salaman 11:44
I've never been asked to draw in an interview. Have you, Jonathan?

Jonathan Hancock 11:47
I haven't! I wonder does he actually mean draw pie charts?

Rachel Salaman 11:53
Yes, I think so! What about walking or eating in an interview?

Jonathan Hancock 11:57

I've certainly been involved in processes that went outside the kind of traditional interview room. So thinking back again to time in school, when I was a manager there and involved in interviewing people quite often, there were workshops with kids… sometimes we even took the candidates to have lunch with the children or lunch with other staff members… You get to observe people in different settings; I think that's quite important.

Rachel Salaman 12:16
It's interesting you talk about lunch there, because that came up when I spoke to Adrian Furnham, who's the author of a book called "The Resilient Manager." He pointed out that it's a great way to see how a candidate treats the people around them, when they're in a social setting rather than in a formal interview.

Adrian Furnham 12:35
What you want to do with many candidates is get them off their guard a bit – I mean it! – at the interview. It's often a smokescreen where both interviewees and interviewers are lying to each other. We call it "impression management," but it's not much different from lying. You want to get them, in a sense, more natural and more relaxed, and a long lunch might just do that. What was interesting is I got an email from a man who said he runs a company, and that is their only selection criteria: how people behave at lunch. And I think that's a bit extreme, but I think it's quite a good idea!

Rachel Salaman 13:07
[To Adrian Furnham] And what about some of the other tips in this section – because you have quite a few: what are your favorites?

Adrian Furnham 13:13
Going for a walk is an interesting one. So the idea is the interview will take place over a half-an-hour walk, and the candidate chooses the route. And the question is, what route has he or she chosen – and why?

Rachel Salaman 13:27
That one's not so easy if you're putting together a virtual team, of course! Can't go for a walk with them.

Jonathan Hancock 13:32
It's not! And it suggests to me that there might be a right or wrong way of doing it. And I've heard of people who've been in interviews, and they've been given several chairs to choose from: which chair do you sit on? Almost as if it's like a psychological test – and you could fail before you've even said anything! I'm not sure about that sort of thing. Although I do like the idea of taking people into more real situations – knocking them off guard to a certain extent, I think… trying to get out of the formal interview way of speaking and really trying to find out what people are like. Are they polite, or kind? Are they thoughtful about other people around them? Because those are going to be so important – whatever the team does, whatever kind of job they're applying for.

Rachel Salaman 14:13

Yes. Well, however you do them, interviews are obviously an important part of the recruitment process. But they're not the only thing. And Dana Borowka, who we heard from earlier… he talks about the "three-legged stool of hiring."

Dana Borowka 14:28
The first leg is the best interviewing anyone can possibly do. through "peeling the onion back," let's say. The second leg is doing the best reference and background checking anyone can do. And the third leg is using an in-depth workstyle personality assessment. And they should all validate each other. And that's why I think it's so easy to use an assessment, because then you can… you'll be able to see, "Oh, yeah, I saw that during the interview," or, "I missed that…. so then I better go back and re-examine a little bit to see what's going on there."

Rachel Salaman 14:59
Dana mentioned personality assessments, of course, just then. Have you ever been subjected to one of those, Jonathan? What's your view of those?

Jonathan Hancock 15:06
Not knowingly, no. We've a few articles and resources about them – because they are a thing, aren't they? And I think they're getting more and more high tech these days. Sometimes they're even done using AI, to try and get the right match for people, and check that a certain stage of the process has been passed. So I think it's definitely something that a lot of people need to be good at, or to think about and to weave into their performance when it comes to applying for a new team. I haven't had a go at one of them personally, though. How about you?

Rachel Salaman 15:35
Well, I told Dana, when I spoke to him, that I can get totally different results for the same test, depending on my mood! And he acknowledged, actually, that they do have to be really well designed and used correctly. And what really surprised me was: he said they're only clinically valid for 90 days, because everyone is changing all the time.

Jonathan Hancock 15:57
And I think that triangulation idea that he mentioned is important, too. I really liked that idea of the three-legged stool. Although it did make me think: is he talking about that "which-chair-to-sit-on" psychology test I mentioned before! Always sit on the three-legged stool!

Rachel Salaman 16:08
Yeah, I once knew someone who had a license plate for her car made with her Myers Briggs score! (Myers Briggs being a personality assessment test that gives you a four letter result.) Now this person believed so much that her score was integral to who she was. And then, years later, she did the test again – and got a completely different result! And she had to totally recalibrate her very essence – and change her number plate on her car!

Jonathan Hancock 16:35
Wow! Imagine that: changing the number plate every – what was it, 90 days? Because that's how long it lasts!

Rachel Salaman 16:40
Yes! I think if there's a lesson there about not labeling ourselves and thinking we're just one thing…

Jonathan Hancock 16:46
… because, ultimately, I think that's a very important part of all of this, isn't it: not labeling ourselves, and also people [who are] recruiting avoiding labels as much as possible: using certain bits of information that you do need to gather together to make the right choices, but being careful to avoid the red herrings, I suppose.

Rachel Salaman 17:02
Yes. Well, there's a very important next step in building a team, which some leaders actually overlook, and that's setting up the conditions for the team to thrive. The Harvard Professor Richard Hackman, author of "Collaborative Intelligence: using teams to solve hard problems"… he told me the rather depressing news that you can't **make** a team great. People can't be whipped like horses, he said. Fair point! Then he outlined how managers can enable their teams to **become** great. And a lot of it is in the setup.

Richard Hackman 17:40
Sixty percent of the variation and how well a team does depends on how well that team is set up in the first place: whether its mission is clear… whether it's got the right structure… whether it's got the right people on it… it's got the right size… it's got the right resources… Before the team even meets, most of the game is determined by how well that team is received, oriented, structured, and supported. Then 30 percent – and this surprises a lot of people – but 30 percent depends upon the launch of the team. What happens in a team's first few minutes is hugely important in determining the trajectory. So the really wise leader will get the team structured and composed and directed right… will have a great launch meeting where the team is, in effect, brought to life. And then the [remaining] 10 percent is kind of ongoing, hands-on coaching, teaching, helping.

Rachel Salaman 18:34
And that actually tallies with what Yael Zofi, the virtual team expert we heard from earlier, told me about "team charters."

Yael Zofi 18:44
A team charter kind of lets the team know what are the roles, what are the resources, how do we want to identify our knowledge, product, progress… how do we want to check or when do we want to check? And then [it] outlines what's the sponsorship, the support and the direction that almost like sets up the course for how you want to operate your team. That approach to doing a team charter could be a collaborative approach that the whole team does together in the early phases of its development. So we all have had input into it. And then it's posted somewhere: could be posted in a shared drive or shared space – so that, as new members come into the team, they know what the team charter is, what's the direction, what's the goal, what's the outline.

Jonathan Hancock 19:28

Both of those experts point out that you've got to get these details sorted out as soon as possible, haven't you. I think that's really extra important in virtual teams – because, in my experience, you don't get that kind of general "getting to know each other." And if things aren't understood early on… in a face-to-face team you can quickly sort that out; in a virtual team, people get the wrong impression and **keep** having the wrong impression for a long time, and you won't know about it.

Rachel Salaman 19:53
Yes. So just a couple of final insights about **keeping** your team great, even when the initial excitement has perhaps worn off a little bit. So one tip is from Jackie Baretta: she's the author of "Primal Teams: harnessing the power of emotions to fuel extraordinary performance." She told me about the "seeking-emotional" system that we all have, which is what makes us feel excited when we do something new. She says that managers can use this as a motivator in their teams.

Dana Borowka 20:28
Even if you're really good at what you're doing, and you're meeting your goals and… you know, things are going well and all that… still, you know, a new job isn't as much fun typically, you know, after a year, or maybe even after six months. It's just kind of like it… it just starts to wane a little bit! And so what scientists have found is that people need to be stimulated: they need to… they need more novelty in their work. Because novelty is one of the key things that will stimulate that seeking-emotional system – give us that excitement again.

So one of the things that I tried to do with the teams that I work with (and I work mainly in information technology)… so I try to look for more and more ways to take the work that they do, and put them into project cycles. And it's better to have projects with shorter durations, if you can. And another thing is to move people into different roles. And just that sense of getting to experience something new, and different sets of relationships, different sets of goals, can help stimulate that seeking-emotional system.

Rachel Salaman 21:43
Does that appeal to you, Jonathan? Do you prefer to dig into a role and stick with it, or move around a bit more?

Jonathan Hancock 21:51
Yeah, I think I'm a bit of both. There are times when I like to just get on and do the same thing for a while, I think, and get that sort of security, and perfect my skills. And then certainly I've had times in teams when I thought: right, I just need a new challenge. I need a bit of novelty. And I think with the best managers I've worked with, they've known when – or they've been able to recognize in me when – that time has come, and helped me or responded when I've asked them for a bit of a change.

So I think managers definitely need to be alert to that. But personally I wouldn't necessarily move people or give them novelty just for the sake of it. Because I know that some people, maybe even more than me… there are people I've worked with… who are just at their best when they're doing the same thing. And there are maybe slight tweaks you can help them with, and ways to help them **find** more novelty. But changing their role or giving them a totally different project would be the wrong thing to do for them. They would hate it.

Rachel Salaman 22:42

So ideally people would get the choice, I guess – just like they sometimes do about **where** they work, if they're lucky. I'll just finish with a word about coaching, which we heard about briefly earlier. Because, whether your team is office based, or remote, or hybrid, a team leader who can coach people can make a massive, positive difference. This is how Myles Downey puts it. He's the author of a book called "Enabling Genius: a mindset for success in the 21st century."

Myles Downey 23:16

If you constantly manage people, constantly work with the constraints, nothing much changes. But if you begin to… if you begin to introduce coaching into that relationship, as well, alongside the managing which is required, then that's, that's a big part of how that can change. And the change is for everybody: people perform to a higher level. So the manager themselves gets the reflected glory, in that people are happier. And, typically, the manager or leader also can stop worrying about the day to day, and kind of… can kind of lift up their head and notice what's going on around, and move to more strategic or more longer-term kinds of activities. And I'm thinking that it'd be wonderful if people did some of that!

Rachel Salaman 24:03

So that's the end of my clips – taking a little look into the future of keeping your team great!

Jonathan Hancock 24:09

I think that's so important. Just recognizing that things change. You can't just set up a team and assume it's going to be great for evermore. Coaching is a lovely way, I think, to just nurture it along the way, and nurture the people on the team, as well, to achieve their best. Well, remember: you can have your say about what **you** think makes a great team today. And maybe what gets in the way! We're at expertvoicespodcast@mindtools.com.

And, by the way, we've had some terrific feedback on our last podcast – about psychological safety. And we'll bring that to you at the end of this episode.

Now, just before I introduce my set of experts – focusing on teams from the team **members'** point of view – a reminder that this is only the tip of the Mind Tools iceberg! Rachel's recorded hundreds of Expert Interviews over the last 16 years, and you can listen to them all at your leisure when you join Mind Tools. We've also got articles on every aspect of management, leadership and personal excellence... plus infographics, quizzes, videos and workbooks to help you through every challenge that you and your people might face. It's quick and easy to join at mindtools.com – either as an individual member, or by arranging licenses for your whole team.

And our podcast today is very much about teams! Rachel, your experts talked about recruiting cleverly, to get the people you really need... getting great teams started, and then **keeping** them great... and how managers need to understand the new **types** of teams we see these days – like remote, virtual and hybrid teams. So what does all of this mean for the individual, prospective team **member** – with potentially many more teams to choose from, and maybe some new **styles** of teamworking on offer? Which team's going to be right for you?

Well Rachel you talked to Morten Hansen about that. He's a management professor at the University of California at Berkeley, and the author of the book "Great at Work." His advice was to not focus too much on your **passion** – in other words, looking for a role that you think you'd absolutely love – but instead to stay mindful of your **purpose**: what you have to offer to any new team.

Morten Hansen 26:21
Yeah, it's a great myth out there that you should follow your passion. And what that really means is, let passion dictate what you do: the job, the career, whatever you choose to do. And it's flawed thinking, because what it really means is that you don't have any other considerations – because that is what it means to follow your passion. And the top performers did something else. They actually started with an opposite question, which is **purpose**… which is, how can I contribute? So passion and purpose are in fact very different concepts. Passion is "What can the world give me? How can I be excited at work?" And it's almost a hedonistic quality. "I'm looking for purpose" is the opposite: "What can I give the world? What are the contributions that I make – and I'm uniquely suited to make?" And if you answer that question, then you're making contributions. And if they're valuable, people will reward you for that. They will give you better promotion, better careers, better pay, more job security, and so on.

Jonathan Hancock 27:25
And I guess, through that, you then come to enjoy your job a bit more – and maybe that's what builds up the passion as well. I was certainly a bit worried, to start with, that he was a bit of a "passion killer," and that it was a rather dull approach – saying: "Think more about your purpose." But I think… thinking about it… it does make more and more sense to me. And certainly getting a **balance** between the two.

Rachel Salaman 27:42
Absolutely. I mean, I don't buy this at all! I think a lot of people can be passionate about something that has enormous purpose. So I don't think the two are diametrically opposed.

Jonathan Hancock 27:55
Actually, we will hear a little bit more from Morten later. And I can tell you, he does talk more about that balance. So he isn't completely against passion! But certainly he's saying: "Think about your purpose… make sure that you're bringing things to any team that you might be applying to." But of course, these days, it's not just that there are many different teams; it's that there are so many different **types** of teams. And we've talked about a few of them already. You might be in the same office, or you might be totally dispersed – or a bit of both. And then, all the different ways that teams can be staffed, and the variety of ways in which they might end up communicating and collaborating. It's a complex world these days – and it's still changing, day by day. So where do those good, old-fashioned interpersonal skills fit in, I wonder. Is it still important to develop strong working relationships – maybe even friendships within today's teams? We have a lot of resources about this in our Mind Tools toolkit – so I'm hoping that this **is** still important! [Laughs] And the perfect person to tell us is Annie McKee, from the University of Pennsylvania. She wrote the book "How to Be Happy at Work." And she told you that, yes, it's vital – phew! – it's vital to have strong, trusting team relationships, despite what you might hear.

Annie McKee 29:09
A lot of people believe, or have been told, that we're not supposed to be friends with people at work – that somehow it's going to cloud our judgment. And it's not the thing to do. I categorically disagree with

that. And I certainly found in my work with people all over the world that actually relationships are hugely important to people in the workplace. And we do have friends at work. When we don't, when we do not enjoy the people that we work with (or, worse yet, they don't like us), going to work is more than a chore: it's miserable. We need to feel that we belong. We need to feel that we're with people who are part of a tribe that we're proud to be part of, you know – people who share some of our values; people who care about the things that we care about. And we need to actually feel that they care about us. And we can return that sentiment.

Jonathan Hancock 30:05
So much good stuff there, I think: pride and shared values and support…. And, for me, I've just always done my best work when I've got on well with people and had good relationships. Maybe not everybody on the team has to have the same sort of level of friendship. But when I've had **some** friendships, and **some** sense of that mutual support, I've always done my best work. And I think that even happens when it's really serious work: having some fun and some friendship has helped the serious work as well as the, you know, day-to-day work of teams.

Rachel Salaman 30:36
But it is serendipity, isn't it? Because you can't really control who you work with. That's the problem. You have to hope that you work with people you like and who like you.

Jonathan Hancock 30:46
Ah well, yeah, we need people to like us, too, I suppose. We can't just assume we're going to end up on teams with people that we like. So yeah, there's work to be done there. And that is actually a theme amongst quite a few of our expert guests. I mean, Annie McKee herself pointed out that strong relationships don't just happen by accident: you can't just turn up and expect this to happen, and all the friendships to emerge.

Annie McKee 31:11
Instead, we need to really dig deep and find the courage and the wherewithal to reach across the chasm to those other individuals to try to understand them. Again, we're talking about emotional intelligence, empathy. Try to understand other people. Trust before you are trusted; give before you get. Those are the kinds of actions that are going to create strong, positive relationships that will not only infuse us with a sense of meaning and happiness at work, but will help us carry on and get through the challenging times that we all experience in our jobs.

Jonathan Hancock 31:46
So it's part of your job… it's part of your work, to work at these relationships. And what about you and the teams that you've been in? Do you think it's been important to have friendships and trust? Or is that something that's nice to have, but you can just kind of put your head down and get on with your work?

Rachel Salaman 32:03
I think those are two things, two different things, actually, Jonathan. Friendships are nice to have, and they make the day go faster, don't they? Trust is equally valuable. But you don't actually have to have the friendship there with the trust. So I've really enjoyed some of my working relationships that were built on really strong trust on both sides… but I never became friends with those people.

Jonathan Hancock 32:27

It's interesting, isn't it? Francesca Gino was somebody else who had things to say about this. You spoke to her about her book "Sidetracked." Francesca is at Harvard Business School, and is I think adding a bit of a note of warning – probably along the lines of what you're saying there about strong friendships. Because she says that social connections can actually **disrupt** the way teams work. They can disrupt good decision making in particular. And she told you about evidence that even our ethics can be swayed by the people that we align ourselves with in our teams.

Francesca Gino 33:00

So just to give you an example: I conducted a series of research projects where I was interested in looking at whether the behavior of others when they cheat or when they behave unethically influences our own. And so what I found is that, yes, this is in fact the case. If we observe another person we feel psychologically connected to (maybe because we are similar, we are peers, we are friends, we are colleagues…)… if that person engages in unethical behavior, we are more likely to engage in unethical behavior too, even when we set out to be moral and ethical people. So, questioning your bonds is a principle that should help us examine the links and similarities that we have with the people around us. And it should make us reflect on whether those links and bonds are actually derailing our decisions.

Jonathan Hancock 33:54

It's quite a serious warning, isn't it? Especially when we were just talking there about generally how nice it is to have friends at work, or to have trust, certainly… and the sort of relationships that you personally need… but actually, look a little bit beneath the surface and it might not be helping anybody to be aligned with people – if they can knock you off track like that.

Rachel Salaman 34:15

Yes. "Question your bonds," she said: that does sound very serious!

Jonathan Hancock 34:19

Have you seen that happen? I think I have. I'm thinking back to a place I worked early on in my career, when there was another team that we didn't have that much to do with. But you could see quite easily, I thought, that there was one person on that team that was affecting other people's decision making. I don't think it ever went as far as an ethical problem, or certainly no kind of legal problem. But there were certainly some decisions that I don't think the other people on the team would have made the way they did had it not been for the influence of that one person. Have you ever come across that, do you think, in your career?

Rachel Salaman 34:53

Well, hearing you talk just then.. of course I think about examples from public life, which are too numerous to detail, even if we wanted to! So it must be a human impulse to… well, follow the leader, I guess – even if it's not a team leader, but the kind of "social leader," yes.

Jonathan Hancock 35:14

Yeah – so be careful of the social bonds. And maybe try and keep an eye on who **are** the leaders. Because they might not be the **actual** leaders, but they might be the people that have that **influence** – like I saw in that team where I once worked. That was Francesca Gino from Harvard Business School.

And how do we keep some healthy distance, then, between ourselves and more-difficult members of our teams? Katherine Crowley is a Harvard-trained psychotherapist and – along with Cathy Elster – the author of "Working With You Is Killing Me" (great book title!). She told you about a process that she and Cathy came up with for coping with difficult people that you might end up working with in teams. They call this "unhooking." And Katherine said that you may have to unhook from a problem teammate in a series of quite clearly defined **stages**.

Katherine Crowley 36:03
Unhooking physically is the first step, and it's taking steps to relieve tension and calm your nervous system down. So let's say if there's someone who a colleague who's sitting right next to you and is talking endlessly… part of what you need to do is probably calm yourself down, because you literally may feel like you'd like to reach over and throttle them. So first you would unhook physically.

Unhooking mentally is assessing your situation and devising options in terms of setting limits. So, again, if we talk about the overly chatty co-worker, unhooking mentally would be to take yourself through a series of questions of: what's going on here? What's their part? What's my part? What are my options here? And then we ask you to unhook verbally, which is finding the words to communicate what you want in a positive way – taking the high road. And then unhooking with a business tool is taking a concrete business action to reinforce what you've just asked for. And business tools we describe as any business option or action that you can take, such as emails, job descriptions, performance evaluations… any kind of thing you can use in your situation to reinforce what you're trying to establish.

Jonathan Hancock 37:14
I remember once joining a team, and there was somebody who just wanted to use all my stuff all the time! Our relationship got an awful lot better when I just took that bit more physical space, and kept stuff at arm's length from that person – and just used that physical space to protect the relationship. And we had a fantastic time after that! So I think, sometimes, just that first step – in my experience – is what you need.

Rachel Salaman 37:36
Yes. And hearing her lay it out so clearly like that, with this great word "unhook"… it almost gives you permission to do it, doesn't it?

Jonathan Hancock 37:45
Now, flexible and remote working means that some of these old rules, I suppose, of team working, no longer apply, because people's working hours may vary… responsibilities may overlap. Certainly, looking back in my career, the way teams worked 10, 20 years ago was very, very different from the way most of the teams that I know work these days. The rules have radically changed. But you've got to get your work done still, haven't you? So how do you perform all the tasks you've got to do? How do you know when you can help others? When it's right to say no to things? How can you approach team working in a way that's good for everyone in this more complex world of teams?

Well, author and consultant Bruce Tulgan says that we really do need to perfect the art of saying no. And doing it **well**. You talked to Bruce about his book "The Art of Being Indispensable at Work." And he took you through a number of different ways of saying no, so that you actually get to say yes, eventually… but make the best decision at that point, so that it works for everybody concerned. He calls this process "engaging with your teammates' asks."

Bruce Tulgan 38:54
Because when somebody is asking you for help, sometimes their ask is not well thought out. So, by engaging with their ask, you can help them clarify what is it they really need here? You can help them clarify what parts of it they really need. When do they need it? How do they need it? So the first part is helping people fine tune their ask. And the same is true for you. Make sure that you pay very close attention to how you frame your asks. But every time somebody makes an ask of you, do an intake memo; show them you're tuning in.

And then we borrow from the gate review system in project management. So there are three "no gates" that you have to consider: "No, I cannot do that" – meaning "I do not have the resources; I don't have the ability to do that." (If you say yes, but you can't do it, you're setting yourself and your internal customer up for failure.) The second no gate is, "I'm not allowed to do that," or, "I don't think we're allowed to do that – that I think that's against the rules." And then the tough one is when you shouldn't do it, meaning maybe it's not a good idea. Maybe you have higher priorities – and that one you have to navigate carefully. So if it's higher priorities, you might say: "Well, yes, I could do this in three weeks." If it's something… "Gee, you know, I think I probably could do that, but I'd have some learning to do. So maybe I shouldn't, because maybe I'm not the best person for that." But then you can say, "Hey, that's not my specialty, but I'd be willing to learn if you have time." Or maybe you say, "I shouldn't do that, because there's somebody better and I can introduce you." Or sometimes the answer is "not yet." But all of this is so that you make room for the very best "yes."

Jonathan Hancock 40:45
I feel like he could change my life, because I'm a habitual "yes" sayer. And I do find it hard to say no. And sometimes I've looked back and thought, "Actually, I should have said no, because that would have been better for everybody." So I think I'm getting better at it: I think hearing his interview has helped me! Are you a yes person or no person, do you think, at heart?

Rachel Salaman 41:03
Well, one of the themes of our podcast today, Jonathan, has been how people change. I have changed from very much a yes person to much more of a no person. And I have much more time to do the things that matter to me! So yeah – I think Bruce has some really great ways to frame "no," in that clip. I love that tip: "not yet."

Jonathan Hancock 41:26
Yeah. That's definitely something that I wrote down and I will use certainly, yes. And another angle on this from a psychotherapist – from Katherine Crowley, who we heard from earlier. She told you that all of this really comes down to boundaries.

Katherine Crowley 41:38

When we talk about boundaries in the workplace, we're talking about those invisible lines between individuals. And this is part of what can drive you mad: that your interpersonal boundaries may be different from someone else's. So in terms of those areas, I would say the ones that cause the most friction have to do with **time**. And that is, one person could see being on time as being anywhere between 15 minutes to a half hour to three days late with a deadline… versus **you** may be someone who's very timely: get things done on time… arrive early… So time is a big one.

Jonathan Hancock 42:13

Katherine says we need to clarify our boundaries with team members to protect our **time**, in that clip. And of course we need boundaries around our personal **space**, too – which goes along with that "unhooking" idea we heard her talk about earlier. And these days there are so many things potentially encroaching on our space. Maybe it's a noisy, open-plan office you work in, or a busy co-working area. And what about all the potential distractions if you work from your own home? How many teammates are doing that these days?! So how do you make sure that you still fulfill your role on the team and get all your work done? Well, Margaret Heffernan is the business leader and the author of "Beyond Measure: the big impact of small changes." And she told you, Rachel, that productiveness in teams starts with realizing that there are two distinct **types** of work that you need to get done.

Margaret Heffernan 43:03

There is what we think of as "real" work, which is head-down, hard thinking, hard writing… you know, working spreadsheets, or slide decks or text or whatever... but really hard thinking work – which is mostly quiet. And then there's everything else, which is meetings, phone calls, email, texting, and all that jazz. And the other… all that other stuff, of course, is hugely involved in the building of social capital. But what we tend to do is rather thoughtlessly mess this all up. So there's a fantastic academic at Harvard, named Leslie Perlow, who did a really interesting study – where she said, look, what would happen if we separated them? And we put rules in place about when quiet time work could be done. And when all the other stuff could be done.

And several fantastically interesting things came out of this. First of all, in one version of the experiment, productivity increased by 65 percent. Now, I can't think of anything you could do, in most businesses, that would improve productivity by 65 percent, that didn't cost a penny! People also became very much more helpful to each other. And I think this is really profound – that once they knew the time they needed to do… the quiet-time work… was protected, they were much more generous the rest of the time. They felt less frantic and less harried and more able to think. And so they were willing to invest in and get a return from social capital, in a way that when all of this stuff is jumbled together they felt they couldn't afford.

You know, there are very few companies I know that would conduct an experiment as extreme as Perlow's. But I have run into a lot of companies that have rules – for example, no meetings before 10 a.m. So if you have a big chunk of work you want to do, you might get in early and feel confident you weren't going to get interrupted until 10.

Jonathan Hancock 45:13

At Mind Tools, in our team, we have a two-hour "no meeting exclusion zone" at lunchtime. And that's fantastic: I absolutely love that. I also like, personally, starting work a bit earlier, so that there are a few other people around, but mostly I can do my work without distractions for a bit. And then I overlap with the rest of the day. So I've sort of set myself some personal bits of separation between those two types of work. But I also like it that the company helps us with that, too. Have you ever used techniques like that to keep the two kinds of work separate?

Rachel Salaman 45:44
No. And I think it's an absolutely brilliant idea. I mean, her point about, you know, what else can you think of that would deliver that kind of productivity increase for no money? I mean, why isn't everybody doing it?!

Jonathan Hancock 45:59
Yeah. I think sometimes people think they get a buzz out of having it all happen all at once. But I would certainly say just do your own individual experiment and see what happens – if you say, for this set of time, I'm just going to be doing focus work… and then for this time I'm going to be doing the more social aspects of the job, and I'll be contacting people and doing a different style of work… For me, it's been brilliant, so I can recommend that.

Rachel Salaman 46:24
People can put it in their team charter, can't they, or their team code of conduct?

Jonathan Hancock 46:28
And I think we should probably round off with another word from Morten Hansen from the University of California at Berkeley… and he was the author of "Great at Work." And it really brings us full circle – because, once again, he told you that it's all about that balance between what you give to your team and what you get from it. Remember, that's where my clips really started: the two sides of it, passion or purpose. He said that's what top performers do: achieve that balance. And it's what will keep all of us working well, and **feeling** well.

Morten Hansen 46:58
What the top performers do is… they found jobs and roles within companies that allow them to combine passion and purpose. And that leads to best performance. And we looked at the data in detail on this. And we found the reason is that they apply more effort per hour worked. It's not like they work more hours; they're just more engaged when they work. And the energy they apply to every hour of work. And that drives performance. And this, by the way, is also a great preventer of burnout: we looked at that, too.

Jonathan Hancock 47:30
So for me, that's a really good definition of a great team these days. It's one where there's proper engagement, quality work being done… but not at the expense of people's wellbeing. You can actually get a good balance between passion and purpose… do your job… stay well… look after the other people around you… but also look after your life **outside** of the team, too.

Rachel Salaman 47:50

Definitely something to aspire to!

Jonathan Hancock 47:53
And on that aspirational note… that's the end of my set of clips for the Mind Tools Expert Voices podcast.

Rachel Salaman 47:59
And our club members have full access to all of these and hundreds more interviews on a huge range of workplace topics. So if you're not a member or corporate licensee yet, just go to mindtools.com to join.

Jonathan Hancock 48:14
Yes. And we'd love to hear your reactions to what you've heard today about teams. What do you think makes a great team now? What gets in the way? And what are the next challenges that we'll all have to meet? Send us an email – maybe a voice note, too. We're at expertvoicespodcast@mindtools.com.

Rachel Salaman 48:33
And before we go today, some feedback on our last episode about psychological safety. What is it and why does it matter? Maddie emailed us and she said: "Hi both. A couple of thoughts from me on psychological safety. The increasing use of the term psychological safety as something that can be achieved within teams and organizational dynamics is something that, as a coach and facilitator, makes me feel uneasy," says Maddie. "I'm cautious that it can quickly become an example of over-promising and under-delivering – and, in turn, a potential disservice to the most vulnerable people in the room. Trust is built up of actions over time, and remains fluid, ebbing and flowing with each interaction or lack of interaction." Really interesting points there from Maddie.

Jonathan Hancock 49:27
Isn't it? Yeah. And also the danger of labeling something or a situation or a team as being "psychologically safe" without actually giving it the time and support to **achieve** that over time. I think that's a really important point. Thank you, Maddie.

Daryl Harvey got in touch with us as well. Thanks, Daryl. Daryl said: "In my experience, a psychologically safe workplace is one where people have disagreements, arguments, let off steam, sometimes say the wrong things in the heat of the moment, but then resolve things soon after and move on." He says, "That stops resentment building up, continually strengthens the team, tells people that they are allowed to have feelings and be human, even if they express themselves wrongly sometimes. A workplace without visible emotion is unsafe," Daryl says, "but so too is one where emotional moments aren't resolved afterwards. So everyone has a role to play in this being honest, accepting emotions, but also been kind and looking for resolution and improvement." And it's interesting: lots of nice crossovers there between that and the things we've been talking about in our teams today.

Rachel Salaman 50:29
Yeah, absolutely. And here's some feedback from Suzanne. Thank you, Suzanne. She said, "I think psychological safety may have actually become harder to achieve with remote working. Screen

meetings," she says, "tend to be formal and make it hard to read people's body language or judge their tone of voice. Emails are easy to misconstrue. Problems between people can build without the rest of the team being aware." She says, "I'd say that organizations need to assess their psychological safety anew if they've moved to remote working. And they should work out how they're going to help people to properly interact and be real with each other." Such an important point that people don't really talk enough about, do they?

Jonathan Hancock 51:13
Absolutely And a quick final one from James Cho. Many thanks for this, James. He says, "It all starts at recruitment" – which, again, we've talked today; getting the recruitment right. James says, "Pick people who will treat others in the way you value, and uphold your team's standards of behavior to each other." So, again, lots of nice crossovers between what we were talking about last time, about psychological safety, and **this** podcast topic – about what makes a great team today.

And remember: you can have your say about **any** of the topics we touch on. We're at expertvoicespodcast@mindtools.com.

Rachel Salaman 51:48
And we'll be back soon to tackle another workplace issue with the help of our expert interviewees. Check out our other episodes, and subscribe to know when the next one's ready.

Jonathan Hancock 51:59
So make sure you have a look at mindtools.com to learn about everything you get if you become a Mind Tools member: all the articles, videos, quizzes, infographics, and of course, the full collection of Expert Interviews. Just think what a learning library like that could do for you and your team! In the meantime, it's been very nice working with you again, Rachel.

Rachel Salaman 52:19
Thank you, Jonathan. And let's "team up" again soon for another Mind Tools Expert Voices podcast!

Jonathan Hancock 52:26
You're on – see you then!