

Being a Team

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What I would like to ask you today is to think about, to reflect on, what it means to be a team. What is a team? What makes a successful team? What is ultimately the source or origin of your team's success? Where does it come from? What is the rock on which your team's success is to be built?

To answer these questions we need to ask ourselves a preliminary fundamental question, namely the metaphysical question of existence. Does your team exist? That is to say, does your team *really* exist? Does it exist as a separate entity in the world or should we say that there is no such thing as your team since all there *really* is, is just a bunch of individuals engaged in individual actions and projects? Now, I would say that clearly your team does exist as a separate entity in the world. It cannot be reduced to just a bunch of individuals and their individual activities. Your team goes beyond the sum of its members. It has an existence of its own. After all, crucial elements of your team, such as its objectives, its decision making procedures, its organizational structure, cannot be assigned to a single person or group of persons within your team. They can only be attributed to the team itself. Hence, indeed your team exists as a separate entity in the world.

Another way of seeing that your team really exists as a separate entity is to recognize that it has various causal effects on the world, such as improved business processes within your company, increased revenues for your firm or improved quality of your products and services. Now, given that what has causal powers cannot else but exist, we may conclude that your team indeed has separate existence in the world. It is more than just a collection of individuals. It in and by itself really exists. It is truly part of the fabric of the world, just like you and me, and the room that we are in.

In fact, we can go further and conclude that your team not just exists as an entity, but as an actor or agent. In other words, your team has agent-hood or actor-hood, just like human beings. After all, in

order to reach certain objectives your team participates in a range of different processes by utilizing a collective rational decision procedure. Now, given that your team really exists as an autonomous rational agent in the world, can it be considered a *moral* agent as well? That is to say, does your team *as a team* also have moral obligations and duties?

To see whether this is the case I invite you to consider the following thought experiment. Suppose that one of your care products isn't tested properly due to a sequence of events in which your team is involved as being one of its direct causes. Also suppose that this direct cause cannot be attributed to a single member or group of members within your team. Now, this disastrous situation clearly bears moral significance. It is reasonable to invoke the terminology of moral blameworthiness – even though not a single human being or group of human beings can be blamed for the disaster to happen. But if this is so, then in this situation there is only one actor left that really exists and that could be said to be blameworthy, namely the team itself. But then it is not unreasonable to attribute moral significance and therefore moral responsibilities and duties to your team as an actor. Or on a more positive note, if your team is the cause of a significant improvement of mother and child care, a cause that cannot be attributed to a single person or group of persons within your team, then it is only the team itself to which we can attribute moral praiseworthiness. That is to say, we need to consider your team not only as an economical or even legal actor, but as a moral actor. In fact, we need to consider your team as a moral person among other real persons such as human beings.

So, let's further explore this model of your team as being a person. Let's perform a paradigm shift. Let us consider your team as a person and think about the implications. What is it like for your team to be a person? A minimal condition for being a person is to be autonomous. Now, clearly your team can be considered to be autonomous. It is autonomous by virtue of the fact that it acts by using a decision making process that is relatively independent from the individual decisions of each team member. Another condition for being a person is to be equipped with reason. According to Aristotle being rational is even one of the defining characteristics of what it means to be a person. Now, as an

agent your team is clearly rational. After all, if the aforementioned decision making process would not be rational, your team would have ceased to exist a long time ago, which it clearly didn't.

However, a person is more than an autonomous rational agent. Another necessary condition for being a real person is the ability to engage in moral reflection and judgement, that is to say, to have the ability to perform moral evaluations. But what does that mean? We can understand what this means by considering the most well-known example of a person, namely a human being.

So, what is it for a human being, a human person, to perform moral evaluations? Let us explore this aspect of being a human being a bit further. As human beings we are always already involved in the world in which, as Martin Heidegger would say, we are thrown. We can never step outside it. To orient ourselves, to decide which direction to take in life, we have to make sense of this world in which we are thrown. We do this by means of interpretation. We need to interpret ourselves, others and the world we live in, in order to structure and bring unity in our lives. Thus, each human being creates a story, a narrative for life, for understanding and dealing with the world that surrounds us. Without embracing some life orienting narrative, we would not be able to form a personal identity, which is crucial for every human being. Now, a vital part of such a narrative for life is a perspective on what we should do and aim for in this world, on what is our ultimate concern or purpose. A human being's ultimate concern indicates what his or her life is really all about, what he or she in his life truly strives for. That is to say, your ultimate concerns are your most fundamental aspirations for life. Your ultimate concerns are your hyper goods. And together they constitute your purpose.

It is thus our life orienting story that enables us to engage in moral evaluations. By doing so we clarify for ourselves what we consider as good and praiseworthy, and what we see as dishonorable or even disgraceful. So, if we follow the paradigm of your team as being a person, then the question of your team's identity becomes first of all the question of what are your team's ultimate concerns?

But even that is not sufficient. For, secondly, to develop a truly meaningful identity as a human being, one has to strive for his or her ultimate concerns in such a way that they can be properly embedded

in a shared context. That is to say, we as human beings can only develop a meaningful identity if we connect to a common horizon that inspires us, that invites us to participate and as such transcends our own individual particularity. Hence a human being needs to develop a set of virtues that enables him to adequately participate in the larger whole of which he is a part. For only from the whole, only from the perspective of a shared horizon can we as human beings develop a meaningful identity and render our lives purposeful. The second question for your team considered as a person thus becomes the question of what are the essential virtues that your team needs to embrace? Now, an important characteristic of a virtue is that it is the proper middle between two extremes or vices. For example, braveness as a virtue is the proper middle between the extreme of being too cautious – too risk averse and formal if you want – and the extreme of being reckless. Or take for example the virtue of being realistic. It can be defined as the proper middle between focusing only on the short term and focusing only on the long term. And there are many other virtues besides these, such as the virtue of justice, cooperation, creativity, commitment, generosity, and honor – to name just a few.

So, coming back to our paradigm shift, if your team is to be considered a person, then it needs to be able to engage in moral evaluations. But then it needs some life orienting story, some narrative for life that includes not only inspirational ultimate concerns but also virtues to strive for these concerns in a proper way. In short, if you consider your team as a person, then you need to be able to explain what are your team's ultimate concerns and virtues. Surely, I cannot answer this question for you. You have to look at each other to answer this question. Look at the one next to you. Look into his or her eyes. Then I believe you will see someone who is able to answer this question together with you. Together you will discover the ultimate concerns and virtues that ground your team's identity and purpose as a person. By doing so your team may truly become successful within your organization and beyond. By becoming as a team a true person, you may realize the true healing power of your business line – and be proud of it. It will be the rock – the rock on which your team's success is to be built. I thank you for your attention.