
Facilitating Team Harmony through an Integral Process

Sometimes one person's personal transitions (birth, death, marriage, divorce, health, etc.) can impact others dramatically, having surprising impact on interpersonal relations and team effectiveness. The following case study is an example of how an integral approach to the situation helped remedy a deteriorating pattern of behaviors and outcomes in a team setting.

A group of 12 employees, including two managers, had hit an impasse about how to deal with issues stirred up within a close-knit team of colleagues. The precipitating behaviors centered around one individual's experiences. The employee in question, Terri, was profoundly deaf. She had been hired from another unit of a major hotel services company and integrated well during her initial six months. Now, over a year later, in her personal life she was struggling with various aspects of her marriage. At the same time she became pregnant. As her pregnancy progressed, her olfactory sensitivities changed—including a new, strong aversion to perfumes and even the aroma of coffee. Terri let her colleagues know about this and they tried to accommodate, yet others felt it became quite an imposition and seemed never ending. Even the zest of squeezed lemon in tea was unmanageable.

As for Terri, the pregnancy affected **her physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually**—including her connectedness with her workplace community. She felt angry, alienated, worn out, and misunderstood. This was the opposite of how she had hoped to experience her working community

during her pregnancy. The situation was difficult for everyone involved.

After meeting both individually and in small groups with some of her colleagues, and applying the framework of an Integral Process, I probed Terri's **emotional state**. What emotions was she experiencing? Her anger, fear, and sadness poured forth. Together, we explored what was behind each emotion. **Physically**, what did she experience when she reacted to the various smells and how did she physically express that to others? What **assumptions** did she hold about her colleagues' behaviors? How did that affect her emotional state and how she responded to them? And what was going on for her in how **connected or alone** she felt at this important point in her life?

In separate meetings with Terri's colleagues, similar questions were explored but from their perspectives—of having to accommodate some pretty strong requests (and then demands) about perfumes, coffee, tea, and foods. Her colleagues cared for and about her, yet the stress of these issues in combination with an already stressful workload (due to recent cutbacks) brought them all to the breaking point. Nerves were frayed and work was not getting done as a result.

By going through a process of focusing on experiences that people had in the physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual domains, they began to untangle a messy set of feelings and interactions that had them locked down in frustration. As they got a handle on each domain, they learned to exercise

their awareness about language, emotions, and how they approached one another as well as how to hold and show good will and faith in each other. They also learned how to make simple requests, agreements, offers, inquiries, and statements about what mattered to them as individuals and as a team.

In an all-hands-on-deck meeting, which I facilitated, the team went through a careful process of expressing how they cared for each other and particularly Terri during this special time. People spoke directly and sensitively. Individuals spoke about what they wanted for themselves, Terri, and the team. A renewed story took form about who they were and what they wanted to

be as a community. Simple, sensitive requests and agreements were made. Assumptions were clarified and adjusted towards good will. Terri's colleagues listened carefully as Terri shared her pain and desire for things to be better. Apologies were offered and accepted.

This process allowed a great deal of pent up frustration to be ventilated and transformed into socially supportive and productive work. Other stresses were still present from the cutbacks, yet this team got through a bottleneck of conflict that had made coming to work a headache. Terri worked up to her last few weeks before giving birth and was given a genuinely joyful and warm farewell by managers and co-workers as she began maternity leave.