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DISCUSSION ON BUILDING HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAMS

Good afternoon, good day, or whatever time you are watching it. Hi Priyanka, welcome. Thank you so much. So today we are going to be looking at teams, and also one of the important points in teams is handling conflict. I am going to play this video by one of our high-performance coaches, Mr. Murali R.X., who is going to give us a little glimpse.

So the role of a coach is to first of all define the purpose, and once the purpose is established, then what happens is the individual role has to be defined. So each one of them, each individuals have their own desires and roles, desires, and motivation level. So how do you bring them together to align with one common purpose. So this is where a leader or a coach plays a major role. So the leader defines, the coach defines the values and the constraints of the team, and he defines the role of each individual players. So this stage is called as forming. I call this stage as forming and when the next stage goes once the team is formed, now these individuals there are individuals when their goals are there, the goals that have been defined might not match their desired goal or their individual goal.

So that is when there can be a little bit of conflict when the team some of the team members are not very clear with the roles or with the idea of being with part of the team. So that is when the conflict can occur; individuals can differ from the goal set; individuals can differ from the roles set to them. So the conflict can arise in this particular stage. So this again here, the role of a leader or a coach plays a very major role wherein the leader comes in, the coach comes in, and then he sets, he clears all the conflict, he clears, he helps them to settle the conflict, and then he defines, redefines the goal or gives more clarity or you know, settles the player with the ideas that needs to be executed. And then this is called the storming stage where both in forming and

storming stages the coach plays a very major role and then after after the storming comes the norming stage where everybody settles down everybody is clear with their roles and goals everybody settled with the with the values that is being set and then the team start accepting their responsibilities and then their roles.

So once this clarity is got ,now is the stage where the coach sets in to work more on the game plan and work more on the strategies. So here we have shifted from player-centric to, in the normal stage, it comes down to the game-centric, where we start looking at the process-centric, not the game-centric, the process-centric.

That was a lovely video, wasn't it?

Yes, definitely! It was very, very interesting to watch how he applied the stages of team formation.

Yeah, right. So he really did explain what was given by Tuckman,about how to build a team. And the four aspects—the four stages—he talks about, just to recap, are, you know, a team first being a group of people coming together. So, it is forming, right? And I love the words Tuckman actually given.

Then, when you put a couple of people together, obviously, there are going to be conflicts of interest. Except in the beginning, it is really nice. Then, working through that stage, that's what he calls storming. It's an essential aspect of sport and life, especially when we are talking about teams—not just teams as in a team game but even a new team coming in any organization. That phase is actually seen.

Once this is worked through, what we see is the norming phase, where players are actually coming together. Finally, as you see them, they are performing.

So, I think that is brilliant. I really like how Mr. Murali R.X actually teased it out for us. So, what comes to mind? What comes up, as we heard him and as we are venturing into looking at teams and team forming?

I think certain things that he spoke of were that conflicts happen because the roles are not really clear. So, you have to redefine certain things and set certain expectations right. The role of the leader becomes extremely important, and I think communication is key. These are some of the things that come to mind.

It's basically a team which performs exceptionally well versus a team that does not perform. I think one of the key ingredients becomes what is really expected. If we go back to one of the examples I had given about the Kabaddi group—what to do, what am I supposed to do, can I take this risk, or can I not take this risk? I think it's also about not leaving things too dicey, and I think that can get a little heavy as well.

So, they are not even going to feel safe enough to really, like you keep using the word, be themselves and go and really play the best game of their life, right? Because that is really what we want,, even as an audience, and that is what an individual and a team would want while performing.

Absolutely. I think it is about, you know, I mean, generally, in our psychology sessions, we have the whole team sitting together, where there are more people discussing their specific positions and what help they actually need from the other positions and how they can actually contribute. So, probably, they also speak about the challenges of their respective positions. Let us say, if it is a volleyball team, the setter speaks about the difficulties that they face, then the liberos speaks about the same thing. And I think that makes a team sensitive towards everybody's roles.

Exactly, yeah.

So, I think that is an extremely important process to undergo. Otherwise, a person may feel that, 'I am contributing more, and the other person is not contributing enough.'

Yeah, exactly.

So, these things happen. Or sometimes what happens is, there was this one particular team that I was actually working with, and then this one player, he wanted to help everybody out. The coach had a problem with that because he was like, 'I do not want you to be... I just want you to stay in your role. I do not want you to go out helping every single person on this particular team.'

Yeah, I love that example. What you are speaking of reminds me of Belbin's scale, right? So, this is one of the scales where it really brings out what kind of role would actually suit this individual. For example, someone could be quite withdrawn, but maybe they are really skillful in terms of researching. Okay... what is their position in the team, what is the place, what is the

setting? Someone else could be a major influencer. So, where do you bring this person in, and who would be a good leader, right?

So, I think I really love the example you brought in because, without roles, it really does get very difficult. And also, expectations—like if, I mean, a lot of our challenges are connected—it is also about what is really being communicated. Has the coach and the leadership team been very clear? Especially, I think this would resonate with the example I want to give. This was one of the teams where a player was towards the fag end of his career. He was also going through a lot of interpersonal turmoil, had a little bit of anxiety issues, and he was constantly not happy. But he was a very, very influential person—very, very influential. And also, on a good day, he could really pep up the team.

So, when we sat with it, we were like, 'Okay, what is this person actually... how can we channel his energy in the right manner?' That becomes the key. And then we realized, because he was so skillful, we could really look into, 'Okay, what is the opposition doing? What do we do? How do we build in? What risks can be taken and when?' We actually channeled his energy, and that seemed to work reasonably well.

So, I think, especially in a team game where you have, let's say, in cricket, 11 individuals, and then you've got all your extras and you also have the support staff; how are we working with everyone? That becomes the key.

I was thinking of *Chak De!* it is actually, of course, they have taken the theme from, like, hockey itself and how it was a group of individuals who were scattered. If you remember, especially the beginning, they would take their name, for example, 'Chaitanya', and go, 'Karnataka.' And, it was only, I think, one of the players who finally becomes the captain who takes her name and says, 'India,' right? And as I am saying 'India' itself, Priyanka, I am feeling goosebumps because that is what it is, right? Like, even as psychologists, we are really working for India. It is not, you know, it is beyond our state, and it is beyond everything.

So, what do you feel... let us tease out the movie a little because I really feel it has got all the elements of the team.

Yeah, I think when I watched that movie, I still remember it was so inspiring and really brought a lot of pride for our country. So, it was extremely amazing, and now it just brings back the same memories, like probably when I traveled with the team.

Yes, exactly, that is what I was thinking.

Yeah, it was so exciting because everybody is like saying, 'Oh, India, you are from India.' It was fantastic to go out there and also with the team, right? Like with the teams, it is so amazing because you have one particular name and one label that you use there.

We are not... I mean, although we have our own uniqueness, I think we belong there together as India.

Yeah, you are absolutely right.

I remember working with this young basketball player, and she had missed the first conditioning camp. And then, she also had issues with fitting in because she had not been part of the first camp. She missed the first conditioning camp, and when she came, she was in a really bad state, okay? One thing I asked her was, 'What is it that you really want?' Can you guess what she said? You're close to what you were saying."

"Belonging."

Belonging. And she was like, 'I want to play for India', and belonging. So we held that. Like for me, that became a cue with this athlete in particular. And she was also very visual. So, i she did not like running, okay? Imagine basketball and not running. So, it was like, basically hold the image of India, and, then slowly work to integrate her into the team because she had not been part of the first thing—the first forming stage, right? So, it became very crucial.

So, I think that is a really good example, yeah. And next, moving to one of the most essential aspects, which we see in all teams and which we would want to develop on a little, is the second stage, which is, you know, after people come, we say, "hi", "hello" , and then, after that, the initial excitement kind of comes down a little. There are so many people together, right, working together, and also, how do you balance the individual's goal? like, the coach was saying, with the

team goal, or what I would say, the vision, right? So, that is where I think our culture sessions become very important. Like, how are we bringing the group together?

Definitely, I think it is so important. I feel that for anything to move forward, communication is the key.

Yeah, right, yeah. And I think what you are saying, right, like, how do we also make way for seniors and juniors to communicate?

Absolutely, because I think that, of course, the hierarchy is essential in the teams. The seniors come with a lot of experience, but also, the juniors are coming in. I think they really have to be guided well, and if at all they are not respected, be it the senior or the junior, vice versa—they are not really respected, then the team does not really become a team. There is no resilience in that particular team.

Yeah, and also, what I hear is, a lot of times when we work, especially with team games, what we see is, there will be, let us say, the young one is the senior player or the captain who is talking, and then, the younger ones, or especially the new players, do not really speak up. And I remember one team, where it was a very open captain, and he said, 'I want everyone to stand up, I want you all to take up the challenge.' But then, how do you build that?

So, one of the things we did was, like, when I did the culture session and, the team session, was really mixing up the players in the activity. And I remember one of the youngest—not one of the youngest, I think he was practically the youngest in the team—so, when, each group had to come and, like, explain, and, to the rest of the team, and he's like, 'Oh, should I also explain this?' And, I could see the joy of the captain, and he's like, 'Yeah, yeah.' And, like, this was a very quiet, really quiet, introverted guy.

So, we had worked with opening them up, right? So, it is really about, that trickle effect goes down, right? That trickle effect really goes down, right, and it was so heartening. And by the end of the session, there was a lot of what we like to use—Brené Brown's vulnerability—where people started saying, 'You know, this happened, and I am sorry,' but in a very held and empathetic manner.

And, that day, it felt like the team had actually started coming together—I don't want to say came together as such—but, like, they really did, because you started to kind of gauge the energy of the team. It started feeling, for lack of a better word, positive or uplifted.

I think as you are talking about this, I am also thinking of this session I had with this one particular team I was working with, and there again, there were stories of human connection.

It was so beautiful, and, on the field that day after the session, we were able to see the players were actually able to understand each other. They were able to appreciate that everybody has their own adversities, and we have come together for a particular cause."

Exactly.

Play for a common vision, a common goal. So, that was extremely amazing to watch."

Yeah, I love that example. And we saw this a lot during COVID, right? I remember—I will not take the name—one of the journalists, asked me, 'So, Indians like to dance—this was during IPL—and he was like, you know, Indians like to dance, and, what is going to happen, with the bio-bubble, and you have all your distances and all that?' But I remember fun activities just really eases up people. And I think something which happened, which I think we saw with a lot of teams, was because we were together. Like you were saying, really understand, like players really going and because I remember, at the breakfast table, I remember once, not just players but even support staff, the doctor said, 'Doc,' so he was like, 'You know, Chaitanya,' and one more person said, 'Your results have not come for COVID.' And I said, and I told him, 'Every time I see you, my heart just drops.' And then it was one of the other support staff who was there. He was like, 'Oh, ma'am, thank God. I thought it's only me because every time his name does not come. But I think there was a lot. We went beyond ourselves in going, you know, there were a lot of people from Chennai, and, Chennai at that point of time saw a spike in the cases, like people literally really reaching out to one another.

I think bonding as a team outside your sport is so important because, you know, maybe that look, like just that look that Priyanka is giving me, probably I need it, let us say, you know, I get lost, and this is going to happen a lot in sport. So, when you see that tender spot, when you see that touch, there is a connection, there is a human connection.

Absolutely. I think sport is, of course, beyond performance. I think, human connection is what makes performance happen to a very large extent, and, you know, without that connection, you will not see performance happening for a very prolonged period of time. It may be just temporary, that is what I would like to say.

I was smiling also because, I think for me it is also other connections, not just human, but yes, sticking to sport. So, let us take some examples of actually handling conflict because, people think—I remember, you know, when you work with certain teams, people go like, "Oh, how is this one with this one?" or, "Oh, you know, I heard something about XYZ," and you kind of go, like, even, you know, we have all heard it, right, at various times. So, I always say, you know, even in a family, there are going to be differences, but we all stay together, right? So, handling conflict is an art in itself.

Absolutely. I think, like you said, even in a family, there are so many conflicts. So, when there are people around, working for a common cause, there will be differences of opinion. There will be conflicts, and, like the coach also in his video spoke about, when the roles are not really clear. And we also need to—I think conflict resolution happens at multiple levels. We need to understand what the other person is going through. And one other thing that could be practiced is not really personalizing what the other person is saying. Because, like, I think we have to focus on what the problem is and how we can move forward to solve that particular problem. Most of the time, what happens is we get so personal: "How can this person talk about me?" etc., etc. And that makes conflicts extremely unresolvable.

Yeah, I think also, following through with what you are saying, sometimes also what happens in the field, in the heat of the moment, things will come up. We will say, the ability to either speak it out, if there is that need, if you are the kind of person who needs that kind of clarity. But if not, letting it go, because if you do not let that go, right, then I think it eats you up.

Yeah, and I think these are some of the things which have to be discussed, probably even in the sessions that we take. How are you feeling? Because some people really carry it to heart, they bring it to the field next day, or maybe they would want to avoid this person, probably, who is, you know, yelled at them, or.. because they feel that, "Okay, the senior has yelled at me, so, I don't really have a say, and I have to hide myself."

So, all these things definitely happen, and probably they want to avoid this person or want to overdo and help out this person quite a bit so that they do not pick on them anymore. So, these are not going to resolve the issue.

So, what you are saying is really, I mean, it also ties up to communication. So, keeping your communication and your channels open and clear. So, I think that is where the leadership group, which includes our, you know, obviously the captain and the coach, becomes extremely vital. So, would you say like a relational coach, as we say?

Absolutely.

Would it play a bigger role or a more significant role in handling conflict?

Yes, definitely, I would agree with that because somebody who is sensitive, somebody who is empathetic, in understanding people, I think, will also help the team's performance to a very large extent.

Yeah, exactly. I remember one of the coaches that I worked with, and, he would say, "Listen, you are going to lose it. You know, I am going to lose it as a coach, you know, when, like, of course, the team does not perform." But also, he was like, "You know, you should have the courage to go say, okay, listen, you know, I lost it yesterday." Or like, "Okay, fine, like, let us regroup, right."

And I also, you know, I am tying up to, you know, conflict and also it is understanding, probably going a little as to what we are really working towards is towards the vision and the goal.

Also, every individual contributes. let us say when, someone who is benched that day but, like, you know, when he carries, like, drinks or, carries water, his energy and what he probably says to the guy there, who is probably on the crease, could really be something very important. Like, I have seen, like sometimes, you know, like some of, maybe due to the wicket and stuff, they will be at the boundary, especially during COVID time, okay, because there was no audience as well, right. But the way they would keep cheering, it is like they made up an army in themselves.

I think that is very nice, inspirational. And there, what is being done is he or she has been made to feel and become an integral part of the team. I think that is vital, right?

And the way you also spoke about the ownership that a person takes and says that, “you know what, I lost it”. You know, going back and talking about it, because so many times you feel that, you know, they do not mind. Maybe the players do not mind. I am the coach; I can do whatever I want. That is there. But then, I think they do mind.

I think also then he is setting that example, that this and this is what happened. I also have to bring in this, that, you know, when we were talking in terms of, like, how do you keep up the energy, because I think that is going to be vital when conflicts come, that it can be handled. And, it was one of these bowling coaches, so he would say, I would ask the guys who are benched to actually, bowl a couple of balls, play with them, be with them, because then you have really shifted the energy.

And I thought that was really beautiful. I thought that was, you know, so you are thinking of the match, of course. But then, after, of course, the team has gone in, like, you know, as a coach, you are sitting back. But instead of just sitting back and watching, he was like, I also want to do this because, you know they are important.

Absolutely. So, That is what, right? Like, either you allow your ego to be very important, or you allow and think that, “okay, my relationship with my team is important, so I need to resolve this constantly.”

Yeah, relationship. I think your team cohesion, and since it is Priyanka, I think I can also bring in that it is your field, right? It is like these beads, right? So anyone up and down, can be pulling down, but then, like, somewhere along the way, someone else can pull it up. And, I remember when I was doing my PhD, right? Like, one of the Australian cricketers had said, sometimes it is early morning, right, and like your energy is just so low, and, we are jogging and stuff. And then you realize that, okay, listen, I am also feeling that, but, let us perk up. And then he goes like, and then, you make that decision to actually raise up. So, sing a song, probably pick up your pace, say something like, “come on, guys”, or a trigger word, and then he is like, you raise it.

So I think, like it is, I think, when we look at conflict, we also have to hold the team bonding, like the way, a team pushes itself, takes those little steps, but which are very, very vital, which can then come in handy when conflict does happen.

Yeah, and I like, I really like the way you said, like, people need to really feel secure as a team, for them to go out there and express with other people, and they know that the team is not going to split because of this particular conflict. It is like a relationship, right? If you feel secure with your partner, that nothing is going to happen to this partnership.

Yeah. So we will make sure that we resolve this problem and we move forward. So I think it is the same thing even with the team. It is that kind of support that, that security, that the team is still going to be there. I can still voice myself.

Yeah, and “I am an integral part of the team no matter what happens”, right?

Yeah, I think what you brought up brings to mind, this example I just recently heard. It was Virender Sehwag was saying, you know, so he is known as this, like, he would like to hit. So apparently, you know, he was—I think he finished or, you know, he crossed his 100, and he was batting with Sachin Tendulkar. So Sachin was like, listen, “I do not want you to, chakka nahi marna—no fours, no sixes”, you know—and he said, “we really need to stay there”. And he is like, if you “chakka mara, then I am going to, really hit you”. And then he says, you know, he waited, waited, waited, and then I think that is where he crossed.

What was very important, and that lesson there was, you know, Sachin was teaching him, listen, you need to stay here. You crossed your century, but, you know, do not go berserk because the team needs you. And he said, “that is an important lesson I learned”, and I thought that was a great example, right? Like, great example, not just—I mean, one, definitely the team, also took up him a little at the right point of time.

So how do they build that partnership? It also happened a lot outside the crease.

Absolutely, absolutely, you need to understand the person you are playing with. You need to also understand what are they actually bringing to the game. You need to understand every person has a potential.

Yeah, yeah, definitely, right. And I think one of my favorite examples and something that I really liked was, you know, I remember reading this article by Ganguly. He said, “I would take out this fear of failure for my players”, right, and I thought that was so brilliant, especially for someone who is coming in or who is going through a lean patch. Saying, you have got the captain's backing, I think. And then, he goes on to give a lot of examples. One was even of Anil Kumble, at one patch and how they come up because you actually, again, taken off one and gone like, listen, I am backing you, you have got me, and you are integral. And I think that is, that is the way a transformational leader, really brings up the team, right.

Yeah, absolutely, and I really like the fact that, it is like giving them security to go out there, take risks, make their mistakes. Like my boss used to do that to me while I was working. So I remember when I did not know how to go about doing certain administrative parts, he used to always, and I used to go to him and say that, “you know what, I have made such a huge mistake”, he would always be so supportive and say that no problem, “I will talk to the concerned people, and then there will be nothing”.

Right. So, it made me feel that okay I have to be more responsible now. Yeah. Since he trusts me. Yeah. And I had to learn from that and also the fact that I could take risks because he is still there. That thin line, between being responsible at the same time, I know that I cannot take him for granted. I need to respect the fact that he trusts me.

Yeah, trust, and also that gave you an impetus to grow as well.

Yeah. Right, rather than shrink where, like, if he had, like, really shaken you up, like, let us say, that first time. That would have gotten very difficult.

Yeah. I think this is great; this is brilliant. So, we have really tried to touch on the stages and especially the second stage because then what you see after storming is people, then the teams come together. Not that there is never going to be a conflict—there will be—but, at least the roles have gotten established.

It is all gotten clear, and then there is a functioning in a particular way, and then they go on from, norming, then to the final performing.

Right. So, thank you, Priyanka.

Thank you.

This was insightful, and we hope you enjoyed it.

Thank you.