

Heart, the must-have for a good project.

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"People will forget what you said.
People will forget what you did.
But people will never forget how you made them feel."
- Maya Angelou.

ABSTRACT

Heart, Compassion, Empathy. We are not the type of business to create a lovey-dovey environment. But it seems obvious that the more you get on with your colleagues the better the project will be. So how do you create a better working climate, whether you are manager or programmer, whether you all work in the same office, or you are working remotely? What does the latest science research demonstrate? What works best in our environment? The richness of a project is found by the richness of the participants and what they bring to the table. So how do you help them bring their best to the feast? This paper will show you what the latest research demonstrates with practical examples of how you can work better in your own project, with heart, no matter what role you play.

INTRODUCTION

It has now been over thirty years since I joined the pharmaceutical industry from SAS Institute. Looking back there have been many lessons learned as to what works well and what doesn't. Primary amongst these situations it is clear that projects work well when people get on with each other and can get into extreme difficulties when they don't. It is this bonding with each other which makes the crucial difference. So often when working on a project we get so involved in the basics of what we are doing, producing and timelines that we forget the most important thing- getting on with our colleagues. So how do we make this work for each other now?

FIRST BIG PROJECT, CASANDRA.

The first big project I worked on was to design and implement a system in PC SAS which would be used to review data and rerun all statistical tables in a mouse driven system, used by the FDA to review NDAs. In the early nineties these were all the rage and each company worked hard on producing them. Difficulties arose for the FDA reviewers= they might end up with several PCs on their desk, each from a different company and each with a different computer system on it. The system we created was called CASANDrA and was used in numerous filings, so we were doing one NDA after another. NDAs are high pressure situations for the team, doing one NDA after another created a stressful situation which went on for several years. The initial team was myself with two statisticians, Olga in New Jersey and Uli in Switzerland, where I was also based. The problem with this situation was, Uli and I didn't get on. We had worked on a study before and seriously disagreed with each other. Uli as a statistician who could program better than most programmers and I did not like his input in my domain. This was personal.

Putting together a complicated system with three people when two of them didn't get on was going to be difficult. The situation came to a head when Uli and I were sent to New Jersey to have a ten day visit to work together with Olga. All three of us were squashed together for days on end in a very small American office. Three things here made a difference. One was Olga's brilliant way of getting on with both of us. The second was recognizing that we all had different skill sets and we were only going to make this work if all those skills came to the table. The third was the fact that Uli and I were in the same hotel and once we got back and had a meal together, we took our unfinished red wine to the bar and sat drinking. Discussions were intense, assisted with trying further grape varieties. This intense contact, 16 hours a day with each other could have gone very wrong but instead we ended up in late evening conversations putting the world to rights. This unpleasant and difficult situation was overcome. The three of us developed a strong friendship that lasts to this day, nearly thirty years later. We had an intense belief that the sign of a good project is when it produces something greater than what the individual project members could produce when acting alone, and this is what we did. CASANDrA was used for many years after that, not only on NDAs but also helping internally with the phase IV studies.

LOOKING BACK, BEST AND WORST PROJECTS.

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What do you think of when looking back at good projects? Do you remember the people you worked with or just the actual facts of what you achieved? Just as important, how do you feel about it? If you feel good about projects and the people working on projects, could it be because you got on well with those people? You had a good connection with them. In fact, for those projects which you don't remember much about, could it be because the atmosphere of the project was not so good?

It is the connection we have to others and the atmosphere which is achieved that makes all the difference to the project and how you will remember it. So how do you make that connection?

We have a typical culture that exists in our industry, that is the programming environment. We tend to be perfectionists (no one wants an inaccurate death listing), we tend to be very mentally absorbed, intelligent, logical and for the most part quite introverted. That does not mean though that with a little extra effort we can achieve a much better working environment on a project.

HOW TO MAKE HEART CONNECTIONS

It's not difficult to make heart connections. What it takes to change the working environment is intention. You must want to do it and you have to be sincere. This is crucial. There are plenty of examples of managers who say all the right caring words but they fall flat, as there is the resounding sound of insincerity in the words. You cannot fake being nice to people.

First go out of your way to contact people. This does not have to be done face-to-face, it can also be done in teams working at a distance. As soon as there is a chance to make a one-to-one connection, then go ahead. Get to know people and not only that, get to know their good traits and their lives. Ask beyond work situations if the circumstance is there but do not push this, it is up to other people to open up, it is not for you to pry into their lives.

A simple example. When double programming most of the time is often spent in reconciliation. This can all be done via email but for a human-to-human connection, it is much better to do it over the phone, if face-to-face is not possible. It is also more efficient to be communicating directly. Talking through who has done what where clause and why this was done can very quickly lead to a positive resolution. But you are also making stronger connections to someone.

Further to this, try to add compliments to peoples work, particularly in meetings. We can be a very critical group, as we suffer from perfectionism. The tendency also is to not be complimentary, positive feedback does not flow, it tends to be held back. So deliberately thanking someone for a good co-cooperation, for example, can work wonders. It is the positive feedback we all need! Appreciation of our colleagues is a huge booster to the collaboration.

Be also prepared to go to others for help. This can make you feel vulnerable and at the same time it creates good bonds to other people.

The key here is that you are also strengthening the project. Ours is an industry that can go into times of huge stress, as we approach an NDA and everything has to be done on time, without error. In times of difficulty, what gets you through is the strong bonds you have to the people you are working with. These can be formed even if we are not in the same place or even in the same country.

The key here is, you must be sincere. You cannot fake it or make empty words, people sense that immediately. There is nothing worse than a fake manager going round telling everyone they are doing a great job when no one believes them. The intention must come as real and positive from your own heart.

Overall, ask yourself the question, how did I make others feel today? It is that feeling that they will remember about you and about the project. The best connections are always remembered.

WHAT DO WE HAVE TO DO TO MAKE THIS WORK?

If we are going to be sincere in our activities and our communications with our colleagues, then we have to learn about ourselves, what we tend to think about, what our own attitudes are, and then further, to learn to cultivate compassion: heart.

Meditation/Mindfulness is a really powerful way of developing self- knowledge. You sit there concentrating on your breathing whilst your mind does summersaults going from one topic to another. But hey, there is this you watching all this going on, bringing your concentration back to your breathing whilst your mind has other ideas and goes on its journeys. So

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you can watch your mind- what does it think about, what repetitive patterns does it keep on using and how do I address these so they are no longer feeding the mind? There is an awful lot to learn here, finding out what you have repetitive thoughts about is a great way of stopping them and having a more peaceful mind.

How much of what you think about is self destructive? If it is change it. Add extra sentences to your negative thoughts to build up your self-esteem and positivity.

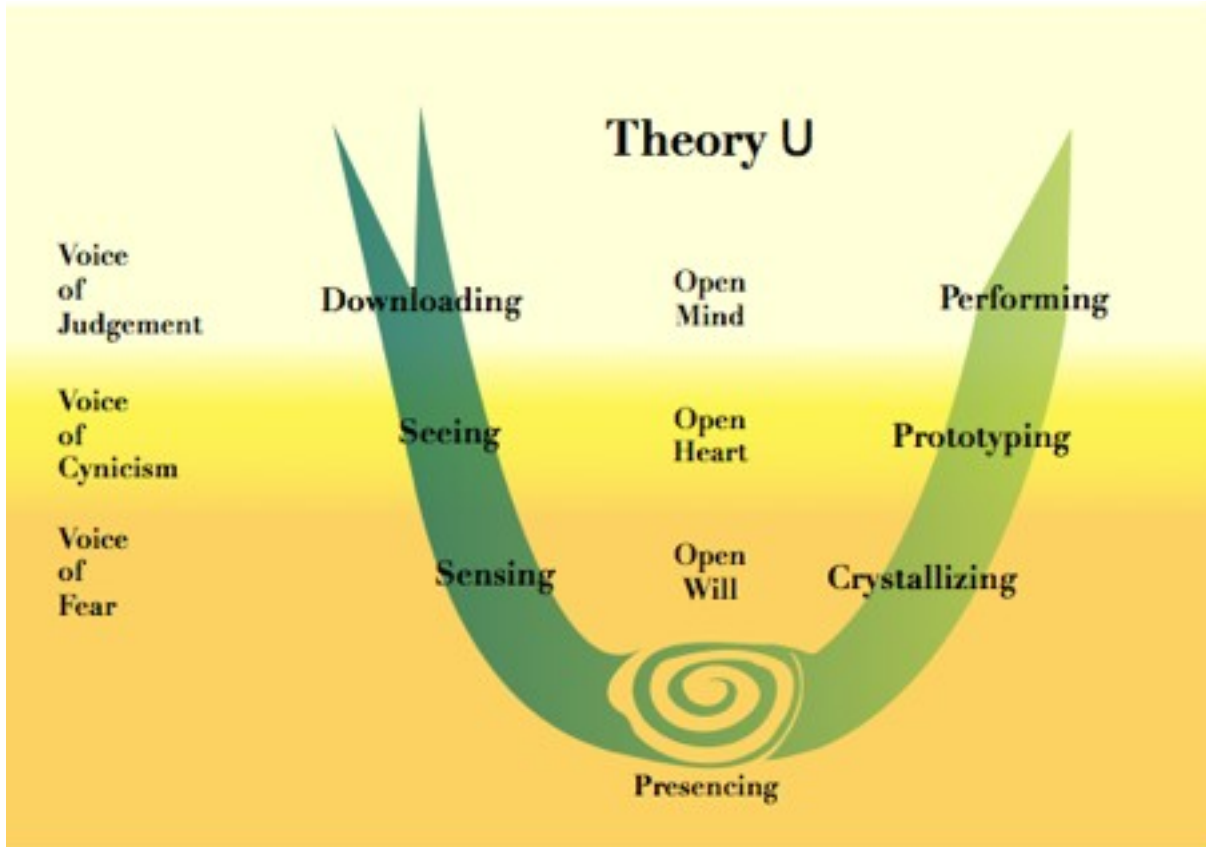
Another exercise which can greatly boost your capacity for compassion is gratitude. For example, I was staying recently at my mother-in-laws house in the middle of a built-up town, a strong contrast to where I live, in the middle of the countryside. Knowing I needed access to nature, my wife pointed out a path which would lead me straight to the nearest forest. The next time I went running, I ran straight up this path, past all the houses and entered the forest. The morning sun was shining down through the branches, forming patterns of light and shadow all around me. I ran straight on and then decided to take a side path, which quickly took me to a part of the forest which was rarely used. There I walked into a deep silence. I stopped and was just thankful that I could run fifteen minutes from my mother-in-laws house in a city and then experience deep nature, the only human sounds around was the crunch of my shoes on the undergrowth. I was grateful that I could experience this silence, see the light and shadows play on the undergrowth as the trees moved, bathed and surrounded by this deep green of the growth. Then comes the important part- when this feeling of gratitude started to arise in me, I concentrated on that feeling, strengthening it, building it up, exercising it like a muscle. Gratitude is a wonderful thing: once you have got used to feeling it, you can feel it more frequently, in many different circumstances, enjoying the simple things in life that are around you.

Further to this, you can boost your compassion by doing things in collaboration with others. This can be as simple as joining a choir. A choir functions only as a group so you help to make a group work by singing there. Or it could be as simple as helping out in a local charity, a shop or any other organization helping others. What would you like to do?

WHAT DOES SCIENCE AND ACADEMICS DEMONSTRATE

THEORY U

Theory U was developed in MIT university by Otto Scharmer. He looked at what worked well at bringing people together in projects and put it into an easy-to-understand form. Theory U gives three stages to getting a project to a place of intense creativity, where people in a group can be in the flow and innovative together.



To recap the basics from a previous PhUSE paper (see link below), Theory U has three points leading to a creative environment:

- “Downloading”- know your area of expertise.
- “Seeing”- be open to something new.
- “Sensing”- be willing to sacrifice your expectations for the good of the project.

It is the “Seeing” part which is important here. This is the ability to “See” from someone else’s point of view, to empathize with them. You can disagree with them but this empathy keeps you working together, seeking the best solution. This can come with the next stage, “Sensing”, where you move beyond what you see from your perspective and look for the best solution for the project, independent of your own viewpoint. So, you move through empathy to the best solution possible. You build something good and have the deep satisfaction of not only having done your best but having achieved something which could only have been done together with all your teammates, a better solution than anything any one of you would have come up with working independently.

There are now plenty of experts in Theory U so it is a method which can be easily supported by outside consultants, enabling a gain in empathic working together on key projects. It can also be done in simple projects. Understanding of the form of the “U” can help you move projects forward.

SURVIVAL OF THE NICEST

We are brought up with a meme of “Survival of the Fittest”. In his well-researched book, *Survival of the Nicest*, Stefan Klein shows that this meme is completely false. We are basically nice to each other, and when people need help, others turn up to help them. You are lost and stop to ask someone on the street for help, they will usually try to help you to the best of their ability. This can be more intensive in different places. I was in a group in a pub in Galway, Ireland when someone realized they had left their bag in the bowling alley, a twenty minute drive away. The bar staff heard this and immediately offered to phone up the bowling alley. Not only did the bowling alley find the bag, someone drove it over, to give it to the owner in the pub. All done for a complete stranger. It is this sort of behavior, going out of your way to help a someone, which shows your Heart. Back in the earliest societies, if you are going out alone to hunt a mammoth, you are

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putting yourself in great danger. If you are going to do it in a group, working together, you are not only more likely to be successful, you are also more likely to return unharmed. It is how we work together which makes us successful as human beings and as a society. Our societies have always functioned better than more we cooperate with each other.

DISCONNECTED

What of our leaders? In his book, "DisConnected: The Roots of Human Cruelty and How Connection Can Heal the World", Steve Taylor, a lecture in psychology at Leeds university, creates a linear scale. On the very left-hand side of the scale are people who are totally egoistic, those who are pathologically ill, such as sociopaths and psychopaths. At the other end of the scale is those who have achieved a life of true altruism, connecting well and healthily with others. It is this scale of connectivity that determines how well we live a life, from cruelty and inhumanity at one end to well-being and connectedness at the other. The difficulty is that disconnected people gravitate to higher positions of power in society, either within institutions or in society itself. Pathological rulers are more likely to create hierarchical and warlike societies, whereas those more connected are more likely to create egalitarian, democratic and peaceful societies.

This is a linear scale. We can move our relationships further along the scale to the healthier end by working on our empathy and connection to others.

We make a better society when we are more connected to others. We also will have a better society when we elect empathetic leaders.

What is this? In business we have traditionally shied away from emotional words, sticking to our more intellectual way of looking at things. But what is this that happens between people, even at a distance when we are only interacting through Teams? You get on with a colleague, and it can be called empathy, compassion, love, heart, even in its mildest form.

CONCLUSIONS

Looking back on a career in statistical programming in the pharmaceutical industry, I have worked on some hugely successful projects, one of the first drugs to break the threat of AIDS, many fantastic new cancer drugs, some rare diseases, malaria, the list goes on. We think about our work and careers in terms of what we do and produce. What would be equally realistic is to think of the people we work with, how they affect us and how we affect them and what impressions they leave us with. What stands out the most is the connections to colleagues is how you have joy in your heart when you meet them again. The best projects were where the best connections were made. Hence it is very clear that having Heart in a project, a Heart for your team, is what makes a project all the more successful.

From the CASANDrA project, thirty years later, we still get on well today. Olga phoned me up as I was writing and part of this was also written whilst I was staying at Uli's house.

From the quote at the beginning of this paper: "People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel."

So how are you making people feel today?

RELATED PAPERS

[Theory U- Social Technology for Innovation, PhUSE 2010](#)
[Create Innovation Now, PhUSE 2012](#)

RECOMMENDED READING

Developing a Positive Culture where People and Performance Thrive by Marcella Bremer, Kikker groep

Theory U Leading from the Future as it Emerges The Social Technology of Presencing by Otto Scharmer, SoL, the Society for Organizational Learning.

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The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace by Gary Chapman and Paul White, Northfield Publishing.

Survival of the Nicest: How Altruism Made Us Human and Why It Pays to Get Along, Stefan Klein, Experiment Llc

How to Be Nice to Yourself: The Everyday Guide to Self-Compassion: Effective Strategies to Increase Self-Love and Acceptance by Laura Silberstein-Tirch, Althea Press

Empathy: Why It Matters, And How To Get It, by Roman Krznaric, Rider

DisConnected: The Roots of Human Cruelty and How Connection Can Heal the World, by Steve Taylor, Iff Books

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