

The Fox and the Hare

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It was another cold winter. The temperature freezing, atmosphere serene and silence filled the air. A pack of foxes were gathering in their cave, lazing around, all eyes half open. Food are always scares during winter, this one is no different. The hungry foxes haven't eaten for 3 days.



Suddenly, the silence was broken by some noises outside the cave. A fox pops his head out of the cave, and saw a hare hopping across the vast empty land. Right away, the fox went back to the cave, woke everyone up and alert the chief fox. The chief fox immediately summons the fastest fox in the herd, Flash. Flash, or Flashy, as he is more commonly known by, is the prime hunter of the herd. He is at the peak of his prowess and is the go-to-fox when the prey is a step to fast for others.

"Flashy! We are hungry, bring the hare back." said the chief. "Right away!"

Flashy responded with a thump to his chest. Flashy burst from the cave, and dash towards the hare. Sighting Flashy, the hare started galloping. Flashy up his pace and gave chase.



10 minutes later, Flashy returns. Empty handed, no hare in sight. "The hare was too fast." Flashy mumbles as he walk pass his disappointed herd- mates.

How did the fastest fox lose to a hare?

In an organization, we are all part of a team, which ever way we look at it. Some networks are more apparent, while others are less obvious. Whatever it is, we all depend on others to move forward. Working together is not a choice; the structural nature of most, if not all, organization integrates individuals into a joined system. It brings people together regardless of their background and differences. Harvest constructively, these diversities offer numerous opportunities to tap on. But at the sametime, diversity is the reason why conflict occurs. Disagreement takes place because we are different. The only condition that would provide for a conflict-free relationship is when all members in the team are exactly the same is every possible way; with machines and robots, probably, in us human, no chance. Resolving difference is easier when a group of people is deciding on which restaurant to patron. In a commercial entity, where more is at stake, the pressure to deliver is constant and this piles further stress on disagreements. When ill managed, diversity turns destructive.

'When two people come together, there's bound to be conflict'. Team conflict is an everyday occurrence that comes in all form and happens at every level. Team dynamics and conflicts is a subject that has been studied by many and numerous related theories have since been put forth. We can summarize team conflict at 3 different levels – conflict with the goal, conflict in tactics or interpersonal conflict.

1. Conflicts with the goal – disagreement with the team target (what).
2. Conflict in tactics – disagreement in team processes and methods (how).

3. Interpersonal conflict – differences in innate traits, values and personal preferences (who).

The most common source of conflict is at the interpersonal level. The regular need to interact with others means more rooms are created for this level of conflict to breed. Couple this with the fact that our values, tendencies and characteristics differs in varying degree from everyone else. Tactical conflicts are not rare either. This level of conflict has its roots in the previously described level (interpersonal) and the past experiences of individual members. Personal preferences lead to favored way of working, which in turn, lead to favored methods use. Past experiences greatly influences choice of process and methods because these methods have been proven to work, or not work. Thus, it is not uncommon to find experience teammate appearing inflexible. When combined, these two factors result in a 'preferred method to use... all, if not most of the time'. This preferred method is both comfortable to the individual and is back by track records. How well these track records are proven is a matter of perception. If an individual thinks his method works, he will remain steadfast on his belief. When different members bring their preferred methods to the table, even with the best of intention, it can be very difficult to seek compromise and the result, conflict.

Common goal has often been cited to facilitate differences in tactics and personal preferences. The goal offers differing members a bigger picture to constructively use their differences at the other two levels. If the goal is not a quantifiable target, room should be put aside for perspective differences. As individual, it is inevitable that our perception of the goal could, and would, probably be different from each other. This is understandable and acceptable as long as the principle of the goal remains intact. What about conflict at this level? Because of the immense influence goal has on how the team works, if it is incompatible, the best way forward is to either change our individual goal, or find a team that shares the same goal.

A common goal is powerful, it binds differences. 'What are we doing?' is an important and essential question the team need to ask when it first come together and from time to time to ensure alignment. Goal is influential, but there is a force that is much stronger and more significant than goal– Purpose. Purpose is the 'Why?' It answers the question – 'Why are we doing what we are doing?', 'Why am I here?'

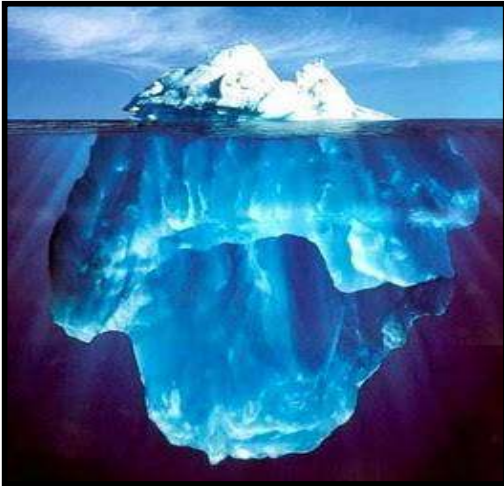
Purpose is of a higher order than goal. Goals are what we want to do; purpose is the force lurking under what we do. It guides and governs our behavior and actions, and motivates our attitude. Our purpose is like the compass we use to navigate and make decisions. Like a compass, purpose provides the direction, but not the journey; it tells us where to go, and not how to go. It doesn't tell us what is at the end of the journey too.



Purpose is deeply ingrain in our belief system; it binds and reconciles difference more strongly than goal. Unlike goal, purpose is a never ending pursuit; it is not even long-term because purpose is not measured by time. For some of us, our life centers on our purpose. When we find others who share the same purpose or would help us move towards the right direction, it is easier to look past any differences and consider them insignificant in the greater scheme of things.

What about the flipside, when the purposes are different? Like most things, when the going is good, all are well; when it is not, we will start questioning our team mate's attitude and motivation. Differences at all 3 levels will become more apparent and they will be attributed as the cause for the poor performance. Differences become destructive, conflict occurs. To manage conflict, we need to first identify where it took place and introduce change. More often than not, we are able to identify conflict at any of the 3 levels because they are apparent and out in the open. But, tackling differences at these levels is merely solving the surface issues, which over time, will grow again.

To seek long term solutions, we need to drive down to the roots and find leverage. Real leverage is found when we address the reasons why this differences occurs in this first place, real leverage will happen after we deal with 'why we are doing what we doing', real leverage can be forged once we reveal where our compass is pointing, and show everyone our true intention, our purpose.



Like the submerged portion of an iceberg, our underlying purpose carries more than what others see, our actions.

So, how did the fox lose?

There are many reasons why a hare will outrun a very fast fox, one of it, purpose. What was the purpose for each running? For the fox, his purpose was lunch. One hare missed, another one will come. Hunger is bearable and can be satisfied another time.

As for the hare? If he is outrun, he loses his life.

Both animals were running, but both run for a different purpose. Our purpose drives our behavior and motivates our attitude – what we do, how much we do. Running for his life, the hare has only one choice: run. And run. On the other hand, running for lunch is another matter. There is always another hare or another lunch out there to be caught. Who wants it more? Who has a greater purpose?