Strengthening Connections with the IDI Team Development Report

Uli Otto, Managing Partner at lrb Solutions, has been coaching internationally for over twenty years, helping individuals and organizations around the world take control, fulfill their potential, and work more effectively. When she began working with a small software company eager to strengthen their internal relationships following a period of upheaval, she knew that the IDI Team Development Report would be a critical tool for helping them move forward with cohesion and mutual understanding. Learn how she employed this unique solution to help the organization and its leaders meet their goals.

About the Organization

- **INDUSTRY** Software
- **LOCATION** Munich, Germany
- **SIZE** Small (14 employees)
- **AGE** Approximately 15 years in Business

About the Team

- **6 FULL TIME COMPANY EMPLOYEES**
    - 2 Partners
    - 1 HR/Marketing/Sales Executive
    - 3 Programmers

The Scenario

Uli had established a coaching relationship with the organization's three partners for nearly two years. When their work began, one of the partners was suffering from severe health problems and the organization was struggling with people leaving the organization. Using the Individual Directions Inventory™ as a foundation, she provided guidance for the trio so they could end the partnership and restore stability. This small organization valued its employees, but the partners – both introverts by nature – had trouble creating a sense of connection within the organization. They genuinely cared about their team but were aware that this was not always apparent within the workplace.

When the organization engaged Uli for team development, they had three objectives in mind:
1. **INSIGHTS** For the team members to develop a better understanding of themselves and each other.
2. **TEAM CONNECTIVITY** For them all to feel good about each other as teammates.
3. **A PATH FORWARD** To establish next steps to continue to build stronger connections with each other

The Engagement

INDIVIDUAL FEEDBACK

The process began with individual feedback. Interpreting and delivering IDI results individually before moving on to the team work serves several purposes: it helps individuals gain an understanding of the IDI terminology and philosophy; it helps them to begin to develop a sense of self-awareness before placing their results within the team context; and it ensures that the time spent together as a team can be used more effectively and with minimal distraction.

RECOGNIZING VALUABLE TEAM ATTRIBUTES

When the team came together for the full day workshop, there was a sense of curiosity and excitement. Uli began by leading a unique opening exercise that she dubs the "Troll in the Woods." She asked the team what makes them special, and they listed as many characteristics as they could, coming to a total of nearly 50 items. This is where the troll comes in: the team imagines they are taking a hike through the woods; periodically, they encounter a troll blocking their way, and to pass they must surrender five items on the list.

Selecting the themes

Uli worked closely with the organization's HR leader to select seven themes that would support the achievement of the team's goals:

- **TRUST** The company leadership knew that an absence of meaningful connections had made it hard to build trust.

- **RESPONSIBILITY/ACCOUNTABILITY** Because the partners preferred to steer clear of confrontation, they sometimes struggled to hold each other accountable.

- **CONFLICT** The partners preferred to avoid conflict at all costs, so they sought a deeper understanding of why that might be.

- **CHANGE** The organization had recently experienced some significant disruptions, and they wanted to understand how that may have impacted their employees.

- **COLLABORATION** While some team members thrived independently, others craved more collaboration, and they sensed that this could be the source of some tension.

- **COMMUNICATION** The partners acknowledged that their minimalist communication style might be getting in the way of building stronger relationships with the team.

- **INFORMATION NEEDS** They sensed that there was some frustration around the exchange of information, and that some employees' more reserved style could be perceived by others as withholding key information.

They continue on their "hike" until they are left with the five characteristics they value the most in themselves as a team. Uli uses this exercise to ground a team in the positive aspects of themselves, their colleagues and their work. She finds that it helps reconnect them to their purpose within the organization.

UNDERSTANDING MOTIVATION PATTERNS

After walking the team through the team's full IDI composite, which revealed several interesting clusters and splits, they were split into two groups to dive deeper. Each group was assigned three extremes in the data – places where the team overall skewed very high or very low – and they were asked to describe the advantages and disadvantages of these patterns. It was at this point that the concept of bias entered the conversation, which they found very resonant. The team could see how their own more extreme directions could be influencing the way they interpret the behavior of those around them.

EXPLORING THEMES

To explore even further how specific combinations could be influencing the team, they moved on to discussing the themes. Each theme in the report provides ample fuel for discussion, so while there were seven themes available, the team voted on one to explore in depth. They chose Information Needs, a theme that explores the different ways in which people are motivated around giving and receiving information.

The deeper discussion around Information Needs yielded some of the day's biggest breakthroughs. They learned that there was a sharp split within the group – half the team craved a large amount of information, and the other half preferred nearly none. Talking about these differences in a context of total acceptance – exploring them as simply variations, rather than determining a right way or a wrong way – allowed both sides of the split to have their voices heard, and to learn more about the alternate perspective. These revelations brought a sense of relief to the entire team, and factored significantly into their next steps.

Additional Resources

While some consultants use the IDI Team Development Report as a standalone tool, others use it in conjunction with other resources as part of a broader engagement. Here, Uli shares two additional tools she used to support this project.

LENCIONI'S TEAM INSIGHTS

- Uli used this tool to help the partners understand the difference between trust based on reliability and trust based on vulnerability. It opened the team's eyes to how their limited communication was hindering their ability to make themselves vulnerable to one another.

DAVID ROCK'S SCARF MODEL

- This model helped shed light on some of the team's particular sensitivities, including sensitivity around autonomy. This helped the team discuss and explore this delicate topic while maintaining a sense of psychological safety, emphasizing that having an emotional reaction is acceptable and human.

The Results

Every participant in the team development workshop agreed that the session was fascinating, productive, and helpful in building stronger relationships with their teammates. Specifically, the organization achieved the following outcomes:

Achieved clarity about how to manage information needs within the team.

Stemming from their revelations around the stark split within the team surrounding information needs, they set some "rules of engagement" around communicating information. From there, they established a template they could use for internal communications. They agreed to a format that would satisfy the needs of those who desired more information, but still feel manageable and contained for those who prefer to communicate less.

Formed the foundation for stronger connections within the team.

This team began with a powerful asset: partners who truly cared about the individuals on their team. However, their tendency to limit communication had led to a lack of connection and an environment where challenges or tension often went unaddressed. By breaking the silence around information needs, the team was able to start eroding many of the other communication barriers that had been building over time. A session of open, honest communication in value neutral terms gave the team the tools they needed to start accepting differences rather than avoiding them.

Uli has been in touch with the organization's leadership regularly since the initial session. The leaders report that the changes they have made in the way they exchange information have been an enormous success. Prior to the engagement, no one there had realized just how significantly the frustration around this issue was impacting the team's ability to function. The seemingly simple change that stemmed from the work has made a major impact in the team's ability to function effectively together.

Tips for a Successful Engagement

KEEP FEEDBACK SESSIONS TIMELY
Individual IDI feedback must be delivered before the team workshop – and the closer together those two events are, the more effective it will be. Try to hold the group workshop no more than one month from any of the individual feedback sessions, says Uli.

DON'T TRY TO COVER TOO MUCH
This report sparks ample discussion, even among more reserved groups. Don't expect to cover half a dozen themes in a day. Allow conversation to unfold naturally so your team can arrive at deeper insights, rather than rushing to the next topic.

DIG DEEP INTO BIASES
Biases seem to resonate on a very intuitive level, and they help the team understand how underlying assumptions may be influencing their day-to-day working relationships.

DON'T LIMIT YOUR SCOPE
While a full-day workshop can yield high-impact results, there is so much material in this report that it could provide a foundation for long-term, ongoing engagements. Consider planning a series of workshops to allow ample time to explore multiple themes.