Stanford eCorner

Ways to Create Ecosystems

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Astia CEO Sharon Vosmek shares research on what factors really increase group intelligence on teams: 1) Social perceptiveness of the team members, 2) Evenness of conversation over ideas between team members, and 3) The proportion of women on the team.

Transcript

I'm here to share with you this incredible learning that I learned at IBM Centennial. At IBM Centennial they did this coolest thing. They brought 750 leaders from around the world, brought us together in a room to hear all of the best thinking on some of the hardest topics, innovation being but one of them. And Professor Tom Malone from MIT did this amazing talk. MIT had determined or was determined to find out what led to an innovative culture within an organization and how to create a model that could be replicated across teams. So that you weren't just randomly hoping that you'd get innovation and that you'd get smart performance and you'd get results, but you could actually measure it as you measure individual intelligence and you could predict its results. The most profound finding was that they discovered that IQ which we have been measuring for nearly half - over half a century actually, had no correlation to group intelligence. So it didn't matter how smart the people you put together, it did not then result in a smarter team. So they went a step further and said well what does? What are the things that we can continue to measure, what are the metrics we should be driving towards to get to the best innovation, to get to the smartest teams? And this is the stuff. This is the jewel of my talk, so everyone wake up now.

We're going to talk about what they found. They found three things that determined group intelligence. So everyone better be writing and typing. Number one, the average social perceptiveness of the group. How well did they read each other's body language? Can I tell that you are bored, did I notice that you're laughing at me, did I notice you have completely bought into what I'm saying because you're nodding your head. These were the things that were a measure of how smart a group. Interesting. Second was the evenness of the conversation. Did the group argue with each other or did they dialogue? Did they share ideas or did they squish ideas? My husband throughout my journey in Silicon Valley has been at seven start-ups. He is CTO at most of them and he is not a brogrammer himself, but he somehow ends up in these brogrammer cultures over and over and over again and he and I talk about point number two a lot, because he himself is fairly mild mannered and fairly soft-spoken.

But put him in a Silicon Valley start-up, that's tech back - excuse me a tech company that's venture backed and suddenly what emerges is this, aggressive nature that argues your way and gets your point across because everyone else is an idiot and I am going to take you to where the smartness is, interesting. MIT found that that's not the way to get to the best code. Okay. So now the third thing is something that was truly shocking. I mentioned, I learned this at IBM Centennial. Probably about 10%, maybe 20% of us in the audience were women. So it was a very large gathering of a lot of suits. And when point number three came up, the room erupted. Two kinds of eruptions. The women stood and cheered and the men stood and cheered.

This was a really interesting finding. The proportion of women on the group directly contributed, correlated to the group's intelligence and its subsequent performance and the innovation it was able to achieve. Now MIT has done this research backward, forward and continued to prove it. The University of Michigan, Scott Page has done very similar research, same

findings. Stanford Clayman Institute, has done similar research, same findings. And yet walk into any venture firm today, find if there is a woman in the partnership and you'd be amazed to learn that 5% of venture capital partners are women. For an industry that loves its data and makes its decisions around that data, this stuff seems so easy to implement within the teams that you invest in and the teams you create as a venture firm and yet it's the last bit of research that really doesn't get moved forward. So I'm here as the heretic in the room to say all of those hiring practices, you know you have heard them, hire someone smarter than yourself. Hire the best person you can, the best person for the job, the smartest person for the job, the top of his class - his or her class and yet really if you think about hiring for your organization we were talking about this earlier weren't we? Organizations, how do organization's cultures get created? Well not on accident. They get chosen and you can choose this for your ecosystem whatever that is.

If it's a company you're starting, if it's an environment you're creating, if it's a community you're engaging in, interesting learnings worth thinking about.