

O N E

The Elements of Check In

OVERCOMING DISTANCE

Whether the members of a team are dispersed across the world or crammed shoulder-to-shoulder in rows of cubicles, distance is always the central issue among collaborators. The remedy for distance is presence.

Of course, it is easier to spot distance-related difficulties in a geographically dispersed team, and people are more likely to attribute team problems to miles rather than minds; regardless of geography, the primary task with any team is that of surmounting distance. The distance that must be surmounted, though, is the psychological distance (or the “headgap”¹) between people rather than the amount of physical space between their bodies.

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1. The “headgap” assumes that basic costs are associated with applying your abilities. That is, some effort is involved in accessing and successfully applying your talents to a task. The headgap baseline is the cost for a person to apply his ability to an appropriate task. The headgap itself then is the increase in cost beyond the headgap baseline that a person would pay to apply the ability of another person. The cost of psychological distance or the headgap between two people is the additional cost required for Person A to apply an ability so that it is available to Person B as if it were B’s own, plus the additional cost (beyond the baseline) for Person B to gain such availability. The headgap includes any costs of the interpersonal connection between A and B, the effort A and B must make to increase their availability to each other, and the effort B must make to apply A’s quality. The headgap also incorporates the cost of erroneous transactions between A and B.

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The **aggregate** headgap is the big cost of working in groups. This means that a psychologically close team that is physically remote is more desirable than the reverse. Team performance typically has less to do with the collaborators' physical proximity than with psychological, emotional, and intellectual proximity—that is, the individuals' degree of **engagement**² with one another and with their work. In The Core-adopting team, efficiently facilitating team members' **presence** is the function of the CheckIn pattern. Consistent adherence to this pattern creates a foundation for the team's greatness.

A team that uses the CheckIn pattern and its associated protocols will be more aware of team presence than teams that don't. A presence-sensitive team will be more likely to address and consequently surmount the challenges presented by its presence-related issues. Team members will be able to exploit the opportunities that emerge when their focused optimization of aggregate presence works. Presence-insensate teams will continue to address the wrong issues. Because presence trumps distance, and distance is the enemy of collaboration, teams using CheckIn will prevail.

THE CHECK IN PROTOCOL

The CheckIn protocol provides two major components for establishing and developing high-performance collaboration: an enlistment procedure and an interpersonal connectivity process. The former (re)affirms each individual's commitment to a body of proven

2. Degrees of individual presence are conceptual entities. You can encode whether or not your organism is in the room. Beyond that, personal presence cannot be measured with any precision. Neither the highest nor the lowest degrees of presence are achievable (though death is probably the nadir of presence). Still, it is equally obvious that you can personally vary the extent of your presence and the depth of your engagement more or less at will. So we need a vocabulary to discuss this phenomenon. The model of higher and lower degrees seems to work well enough for a start.

efficiency-enhancing behaviors. The latter provides individuals with an opportunity to efficiently reveal their personal states.

CheckIn begins with a rich, interactive roll call. This is its connective component. Conventionally, a roll call provides a way to determine who is physically present. With the CheckIn protocol, each team member can also disclose³ the character and the disposition of his presence. While an ordinary roll call asks, “Who is present?”, the CheckIn pattern also asks, “What’s going on with you?”

Each individual CheckIn culminates in a brief statement (that is, “I’m in”) that renews the individual’s commitment to seek efficiency and to “play by the rules” of The Core.⁴

THE PASSER PROTOCOL

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*Preparations before
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self-awareness.*

THE CHECK OUT PROTOCOL

Occasionally, an individual will take a break from the intense levels of productive engagement required by The Core. The CheckOut protocol makes such breaks possible and minimizes any disruption to the rest of the team.

THE PASSER PROTOCOL

The Passer protocol serves as a safety valve for the entirety of The Core protocols. It provides a means for any individual to decline to participate in a Core protocol or process without being questioned by the other team members.

3. Disclosure typically follows discovery. Each team member is routinely provided a good excuse to spend a moment discovering before disclosure, namely, that he is about to speak to his colleagues. His preparations before checking in are important moments of introspection and self-awareness. Also, the general attenuation to disclosures of each other’s CheckIns helps align the group.

4. The rules are prescribed variously by each protocol. Generally, the group adopts the CheckIn commitments and/or a team constitution a priori. The “rules” are specific expressions of the guiding values behind The Core protocols. They grow out of an exclusive focus on achieving the most with the least expenditure of team time and other resources.

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With few exceptions, any team member can pass on any activity associated with The Core protocols at any time, for any reason, without extra scrutiny.

CONNECTION

Connection is a pattern that describes the process and benefits of mutual presence.

PROBLEM BEHAVIORS

There are reasons that the higher degrees of individual presence aren't routinely found in teams that do not use The Core. The attitudes and behaviors we have seen repeatedly are captured in three presence-related antipatterns: TooEmotional, NoHurtFeelings, and WrongTolerance.

TOO EMOTIONAL

When you encounter intense emotion at work, you often feel that someone is being too emotional. This condition usually arises when normal, everyday emotion, after being too long repressed, suddenly erupts. When emotions are processed in this delayed, bursty, and unpredictable way, the behavior that results often is, or seems, ineffective or **self-destructive**. The problem, though, is not that the person is too emotional. He is not emotional enough.

NO HURT FEELINGS

This common antipattern describes the bad decisions and ineffective steps that people take to avoid telling one another the truth.

WRONG TOLERANCE

Tolerance is not always a virtue. Behaviors that don't work should not be tolerated. But they are.

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CheckIn depends on several other patterns also covered in Part I.

TEAM = PRODUCT

The Team = Product pattern identifies and mediates group problems by comparing and contrasting the characteristics of the team with the characteristics of its products. Applying the Team = Product pattern supplies ample and effective team diagnostics.

SELF - CARE

The Self-Care pattern describes the desirable effects that accrue to a team when each person on it is responsible for taking care of one person and one person only: himself.

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THINKING AND FEELING

The ThinkingandFeeling pattern describes the benefits and delineates the surprisingly challenging practice of thinking and feeling simultaneously.

PRETEND

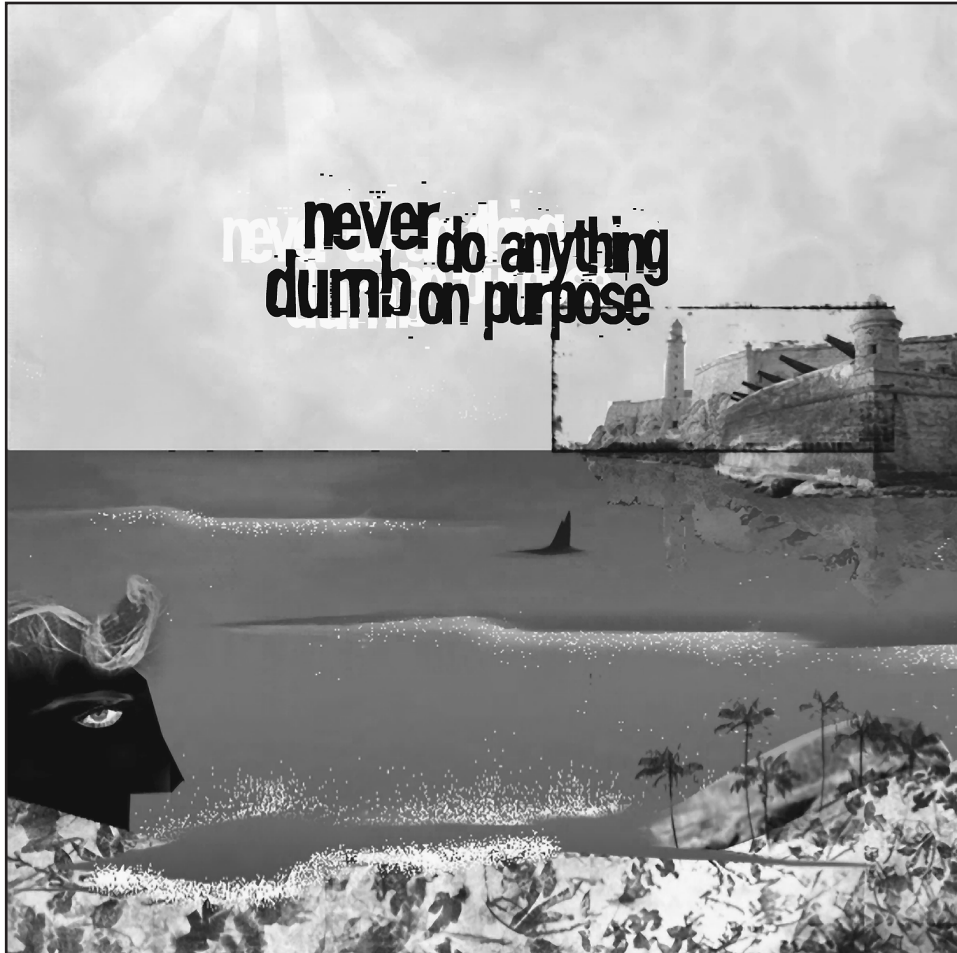
The Pretend pattern identifies the importance of experimenting with beliefs and performing thought experiments as a way to discover effectiveness.

GREATNESS CYCLE

The GreatnessCycle pattern identifies a desirable group value system and describes in practical terms some of the behaviors that embody those values (smarts, presence, integrity, conflict, passion, and greatness). The sequence of GreatnessCycle is laid bare, and the pattern depicts how the application of one value leads to the next.

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When smart individuals intensify their presence (a requisite characteristic of smartness), their resulting expressions of integrity lead to conflict. Conflict, in turn, will tend to line people up behind what they care about, which is, at heart, the definition of passion. The maturing of passion creates the conditions that allow for great results.

It is unlikely that a team will consistently attain excellence, and get its shot at greatness, without experiencing this cycle.

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