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## All is vanity

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**People should be encouraged to believe that ‘we are basically relational beings, unique and not replaceable, yet incomplete without the other who we dread.’**

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It is probably incorrect to make untested or unqualified assumptions about teams in organisations, yet the increasing number of invitations I receive from organisations to help build and enhance team spirit, suggests that the sponsors who invite me believe that “something” ails the organisation.



The first and most obvious brief given is that “as individuals, members are very competent and talented, yet as a team they do not pull together.” I cannot dispute this assertion as obviously it is being experienced and felt by those who wish to commission me.

A less known and existential approach, which concerns itself, as its proponents believe, with “the individual's need to find meaning,” emphasises that when people for whatever reason feel alone, they tend to allow themselves to be plagued by sometimes actual, yet most often imagined judgements of others about them.

They are unable to stop thinking about what others think of them. They may feel embarrassed by what they may have said at a meeting and often think they are viewed as being tactless and in extreme situations even consider what they may have said, again, perhaps in a meeting, as idiotic.

When such thoughts, which impact feelings, erupt within us, we think that others tend to make us into something we feel we are not, something we do not want to see ourselves as and, thus, shift the responsibility of the feelings in us as having been caused by the others.

In such moments we feel robbed of our freedom and feel that others are forcing us to be what they want us to be, for them rather than what we are for ourselves. When such thoughts swirl in

us, we experience a sense of enslavement to the opinion of others about us. Hence we suffer shame, embarrassment, and assumed humiliation.

What then is the possible panacea from such assumptions that might grip people, forcing them to flex, resulting ostensibly in a fractured sense of togetherness and 'team work?'

Given the rapidity with which the rug is being pulled from below each one of us who constitute a 'team member', existentialists recommend that before seeking intervention from outside, organisations 'must' help individuals work through their personal dilemmas.

They must help members understand that what they allow themselves to ruminate about comes from the choices they are making in selecting from the buffet of thoughts that course through them. They have to impress upon them that as people we always tend to interpret a situation, a suggestion and even an acknowledgment of us, if given, in terms of 'the lack I see in it.'

The harshest truth we must wake up to is that by nature we will 'always experience a lack of something,' and if we think our lives will only be complete when that lack of something is fulfilled, we are doomed 'forever', as the famous existentialist Albert Camus said, to 'push a large boulder to the top of a hill only to watch it roll down.'

In summary, if the desire is to assemble persons into an effective and performing team, even while "admitting" that each individual is competent and talented, yet also paradoxically believing that as a team "they do not pull together," the way forward is to help people as individuals believe that "we are basically relational beings, unique and not replaceable, yet incomplete without the other who we dread."

If each person who is being enlisted as a team member is made aware that "the individual is not a passive observer" but like a member of a jazz band, where individuals bring their individuality, yet together can create symphony, the tide of "imagined resistance" to play along will be reversed.

A cousin of mine, when commenting on the galaxy of stars that light up the night sky, shared a thought with me many years ago and as I close this piece, I recall what she said. It aptly fits into creating a winning team. She said: "Have you looked up and seen the sky on a clear night? If you do, you will see symphony in progress where each individual 'star' is embellishing the other through their 'joined performance.' There is no evident conductor, no presence of a baton wielder, yet there is a symphony being performed, flawless and enthralling."

In effect, by helping each member of the team to become who he/ she are meant to be, separation between people will cease to be visible.

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