



Are You Smarter Than a Kindergartner?

Most of you have probably participated in a team building event where you were asked to create the tallest structure you could with some string, tape, spaghetti, and a marshmallow on the top. If you haven't, I highly recommend it. Especially if you are looking to increase your blood pressure.

Peter Skillman, a designer and engineer, wanted to find out why some groups perform better completing complex tasks than others. He used this common team building exercise as the challenge for these teams. He put together a series of four-person groups of MBA students from Stanford, the University of California, the University of Tokyo, and a few other schools. Elementary schools to be exact.

He proceeded to pit the MBA Students against numerous groups of Kindergarteners. The Kindergarteners won by a landslide. The elementary school groups averaged towers that reached twenty-six inches tall. The business student's towers averaged less than ten. Surely this couldn't be true. How is it that all those years of education did not put them over the top? Answer: Status Management.

While the Kindergarteners got right to work communicating in short bursts, the business students were too worried about who was in charge and if it was safe to challenge the ideas of the others in the group. The MBA Students also spent a considerable amount of time trying to figure out what the rules of engagement were among their teammates. They appeared to function well as a group on the surface, but their actual behaviors were chock full of inefficiencies.

This obviously doesn't mean that the Kindergartners were actually smarter than the MBA students. It all boils down to the hierarchical roadblocks we create as we grow into adults. The work of the Kindergarteners was erratic and noticeably disorganized, but they just dove in unworried about the egos and status within the group. The Kindergarteners worked in an environment that was:

1. Safe
2. Where they shared vulnerability
3. Where they had the same true purpose – completing the task, not jockeying for position

Imagine the success the Kindergarteners could have realized if they had the knowledge and experience of the MBA Students as well. Maybe we should act a little more like Kindergarteners the next time we meet and collaborate.

-Scot

Coyle, Daniel. *The Culture Code*. Penguin, 2018.