## Key Insights to Build Strategy for Collaboration as An Organizational Practice -A Case Study of a Professional Service Firm in Thailand

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## Abstract

This study focuses on creating a strategy for building a strategy for collaboration as an organizational practice based on insights on work flexibility, meaningful work, self-transcendence, communication, trust and collaboration. The study aimed to design the a strategy for collaboration as organizational practice based on the common themes from the interviews . This qualitative research utilized questionnaire using the Appreciative Inquiry model for open-ended questionnaire and one-on-one interview with total 15 participants. Content analysis was used to generate themes from interviews which the results showed that the straightforward and honest communication, respect of identity and opinion of others and ability to express opinions, empowerment and delegation, integration of value between work and life, and connection are the common themes in designing strategy for collaboration as an organization practice for this professional firm.

## Introduction

Professional service provider firms, including sectors of consulting and advisory, law, finance, tax, and accounting, operate in environments that are characterized by a diverse, multigenerational workforce. This generational diversity brings a wide array of experiences, perspectives, and work styles which offer both opportunities and challenges in fostering collaboration within this type of business.

Today, the global workforce is more generationally diverse than ever before, comprising of Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z in one particular team, department, and organization where each generation brings distinct values, work ethics, and communication styles to the workplace. The diversity in generation can lead to both opportunities and challenges at the same time. As organizations strive to create a collaborative

culture for integration of intergeneration, the organization should understand and bridge these generational differences crucial for enhancing teamwork, harmony of the team, and sustainable culture.

**Organizational Diagnosis and Possibility Statement**

The study used one Thai professional services provider in consulting services that has in ternational networking with the worldwide office. There are several units of     services in the fi rm, which can be sub-categorized as sub-service line (SSL), and each SSL has its own hierarch y of professionals based on year of experience. The employees have been divided based on prof essional level and position ranking from Consultant, Senior Consultant, Manager, Senior Mana ger, Director and Partner.

Based on the SOAR analysis (Strengths, Opportunity, Aspirations, and Results) collected via the interviews with four team members of sub-service line of the selected company, namely the Consultant, Senior consultant, Manager, and Senior manager. The team members stated the need for connection and collaboration, and how the learning and creativity development drive the success in personal life and professional life, opportunities to develop the learning and creativity toward work and life, and positive business outcome in terms of business revenue and client satisfaction.

The team also stated that there is a potential to build a highly collaborative culture that effectively mitigates intergenerational conflicts by leveraging its strengths, such as a positive, "can-do" attitude and trust. By promoting such environment, team members, regardless of their generational or professional rank can feel encouraged to share their perspectives, enhance creativity, productivity, and individual achievement. The opportunity lies in creating a safe and supportive atmosphere that promotes continuous learning and open communication, leading to stronger relationships, higher engagement, and better team's performance and individual's performance. Through the alignment of personal growth with organizational or team goals through meaningful work, the team can achieve a sustainable and positive workplace culture. This culture will not only improve business outcomes, such as increased productivity and client satisfaction, but also ensure long-term success by embracing the diverse strengths of all team members.

**Research Objectives**

1. To gain insights on work flexibility, meaningful work, self-transcendence, communication, trust and collaboration

2. To gain insights on the 'as is' collaboration and 'to be' collaboration as an organizational practice

3. To design a strategy for collaboration as an organizational practice based on the common themes.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the insights on work flexibility, meaningful work, self-transcendence, communication, trust and collaboration?

2. What are the insights on the 'as is' collaboration and 'to be' collaboration as an organizational practice?

3. What strategy for collaboration as an organizational practice may be designed based on the common themes generated from the study?

**Significance of the study**

The results of this study contributes to the team members of the selected company. to assess their current work and goals and develop a strategy to drive success for all team members coming from different generations and with varying levels of work experience. The findings of this study serve as a guideline for management to emphasize elements to achieve better team performance. Lastly, for Organizational Development practice, this paper aims to contribute collaborative culture strategies. This paper aims to provide a framework for future studies in different contexts and locations.

**Limitation of the study**

This qualitative study covers only five factors, namely flexibility, meaningful work, self-transcendence, culture of trust, and transparent communication. The result of the study can be generalized only for this research group. For this research, only qualitative research was done by using Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and SOAR with one-on-one interview and open-ended questions with limited number of interviewees based on their professional level.

**Literature Review**

The concept of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) was introduced by Cooperrider and Srivastva in 1987 (Attiah, 2015; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987). Appreciative Inquiry is a theory and practice for moving toward change and transformation of the organization in a positive way by focusing on value, vision, achievement, and best practice (Attiah, 2015). The AI process with 5Ds I which includes Definition-stage to clarify the focus of the inquiry and define the purpose of inquiry (Attiah, 2015), Second is the Discovery stage which involves appreciating the valuing the best of 'what is', the question in this stage is what 'to find' and 'discover' (Attiah, 2015). The next stage is the Dream stage which involves conversations on 'what might be' envisioning and imagining, thinking of the organization as an open book (Attiah, 2015; Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987).  The fourth stage is Design to co-constructing and dialoging of 'what should be' (Attiah, 2015) by figuring out the way to make the dream a reality (Seng et al., 2021). Last, Destiny/ Delivery, is the final stage to collect the imagination and discourse about the future (Attiah, 2015), the expected outcome of implementation with the evaluation procedures (Seng et al., 2021).

**Figure 1**

*Appreciative Inquiry Process – 5Ds (Attiah, 2015).*
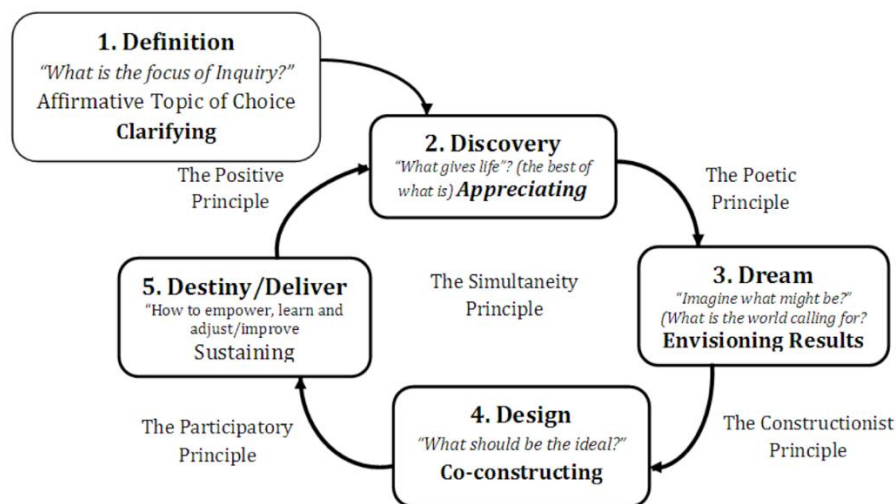


The Employee Engagement model by Aon Hewitt was introduced in 2015 and indicates six engagement drivers, such as leadership, performance, brand, company practices, the basics and the work.  The Engagement Driver consists of foundation and differentiators.

The foundation engagement drivers consist of company practices, the basics, and work. Company practices include communication, diversity and inclusion, and Customer focus. Basics are job security, safety, work environment, and work/ life balance. Work includes collaboration, and employment, while brand, leadership, and performance are under Differentiators as the Engagement Driver, where; Brand refers to reputation of the company, and/or corporate responsibility. Leadership includes senior leaders and business unit leaders. Lastly, Performance includes career opportunity, learning and development, performance management, people management, and reward and recognition.

**Figure 2**

*The Aon Hewitt Employee Engagement Model (Aon Hewitt's Model of Employee Engagement, 2015)*
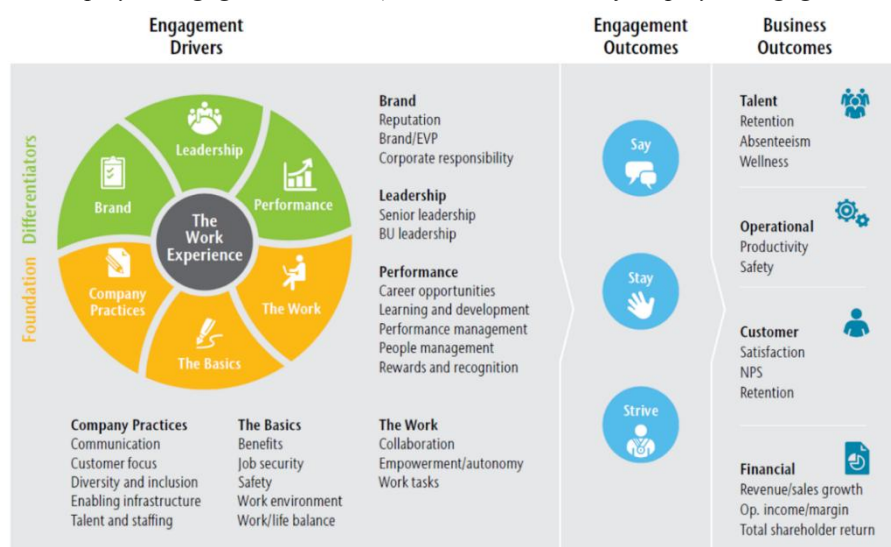
Francis and Hoefel (2018) stated that each generation wants flexibility of work where they can choose when to work to support their family and enjoy work life balance.

Trust has significant effect on collaboration, knowledge sharing, and employee engagement. The higher level of trust can lead to increased job satisfaction, reduced turnover, and better organizational performance (Colquitt et al., 2007; Whitener et al., 1998).

Self-transcendence can enhance collaboration by fostering a sense of shared purpose and goals. Employees engaged in self-transcendence are more likely to collaborate effectively, share knowledge, and support one another (Kahn, 1990).

Meaningful work fosters a sense of shared purpose/ goal, which can enhance teamwork, communication, and mutual support (Cameron & Dutton, 2003).

In a study of communication effectiveness, transparency in communication is associated with increased trust, employee engagement, and satisfaction among employees (Grunig & Hon, 1999). The result of a study on internal communication strategies and employee engagement reveals a positive association between transparent communication with the higher level of engagement (Kimani, 2024).

**Figure 3**

*Conceptual Framework*
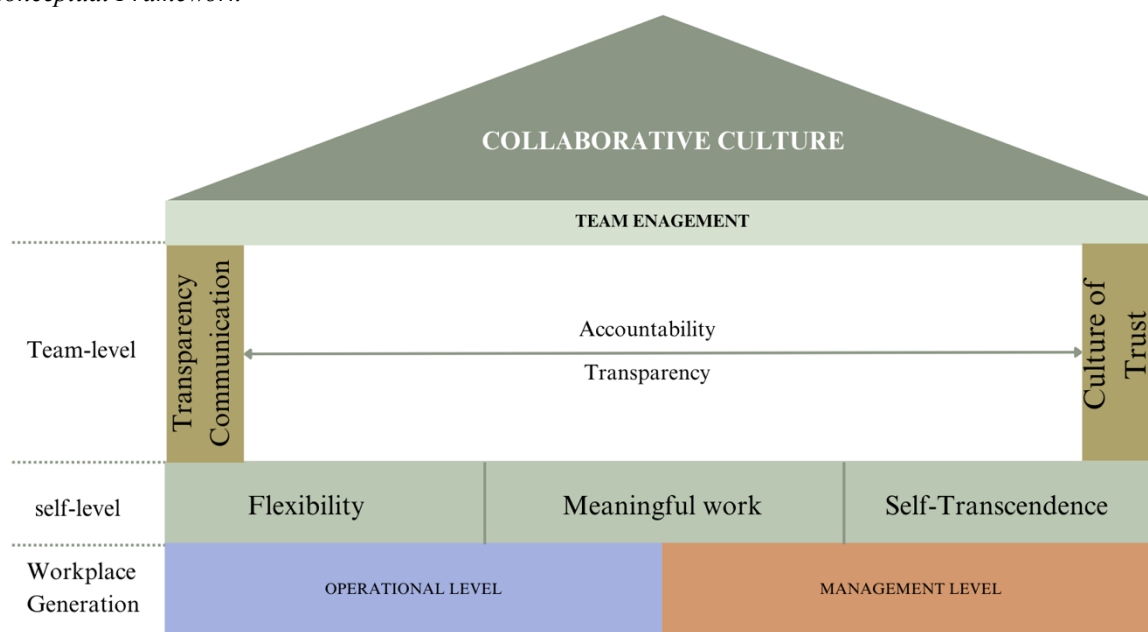


The conceptual framework developed for this study shows different factors at the self and team levels that contribute to building a collaboration via team engagement within an intergeneration in the workplace. The framework highlights the role of team engagement as the ground of collaboration which is supported by five factors of flexibility, meaningful work, self-transcendence, transparency communication, and culture trust. The framework suggests that by fostering flexibility, meaningful work, self-transcendence, transparency, and trust, can enhance collaboration as an organizational practice

## Research Methodology

**Research Design**

This research used qualitative research method. Data was collected using an online questionnaire survey with open-ended questions.

**Research Instrument**

The Open-ended questionnaire utilized the design of Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987) 5-D Model: Define, Discovery, Dream, Design, and Delivery . Three experts conducted the Item Objective Congruence and the results showed that all the interview questions obtained a mean score of $\geq 0.66$ and therefore acceptable.

**Research Sample**

The qualifications of the 26 intended informants of the study included employees from various groups in terms of age, year of service, and year of experience to provide different perspectives on study factors, namely flexibility, meaningful work, self-transcendence, transparency communication, and culture of trust. Only 15 informants agreed to be part of the study.

**Data Collection**

The researcher conducted a briefing session to all participants to provide them with the research background and objectives of the research, definition of terms, and explanation of questions in the questionnaire. The survey was distributed online.

**Data analysis - Qualitative Analysis**

The qualitive data was analyzed using content analysis from three coders, who analyze answers from questionnaires by using of the inter-coding of each response and finding common of keywords and creating common themes. The themes generated were used to create the strategy plan.

## Results and Discussion

**Demographics of the Informants**

**Gender**:  There were a total of 15 informants, with 4 males (27%) and 11 females (73%).

**Position / Professional Level / Rank**: Of the total number of participants; 27% are consultants, 27% are managers, Directors and Partner (20%), Senior consultant (13%) and Senior Manager (13%)

**Table 1**

*Common themes on Flexibility*

| AI/ Factor | Flexibility | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Define | *What is the meaning* | 1. Flexibility and Autonomy<br>2. Work-Life Balance and Integration<br>3. Results-Oriented Performance<br>4. Task Management and Organization<br>5. Respect for Time and Fairness *"There are no limitations on working time, but everyone does their best and does not take advantage of the organization."* |
| Discovery | *What is the best experience* | 1. Work Flexibility<br>2. Breaks and Rest<br>3. Urgent and Non-Urgent Work<br>4. Permission and Leave Policies<br>5. Performance and Quality Maintenance *"During the COVID, the work, is changed from on-site to be work from home, employee has responsibility to work, and discipline to maintain good performance."*<br>6. Goal Setting and Achievement<br>7. Team Satisfaction and Happiness<br>8. Overtime for Deadlines<br>9. Vacation Days and Leave Restrictions<br>10. Stress Management<br>11. Compassionate Leave and Personal Support |
| Dream | *What would you like to see in future* | 1. Flexibility<br>2. Teamwork and Coordination *"Highly trust in the team creates the confidence of team members, leading to collaborative and efficient work."*<br>3. Efficiency and Quality<br>4. Aptitude and Abilities<br>5. Work Overload<br>6. Last-Minute Requests<br>7. Office vs Work from Home<br>8. Revenue Pressure<br>9. Rules and Structure |
| Design | *How to achieve it* | 1. Communication and Coordination<br>2. Team Building and Relationships<br>3. Flexibility *"To build serious flexibility at work, propose the activity and strategy as following: having a policy and standardize flexibility work."*<br>4. Trust and Teamwork<br>5. Result-Oriented<br>6. Evaluation and Monitoring<br>7. Hiring and Team Expansion<br>8. Work From Home<br>9. Understanding and Responsibility |

| AI/ Factor | Flexibility | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Delivery | *What would be the changes or impact* | 1. Communication and Management<br>2. Work Happiness and Motivation *"Work happily and want to work."*<br>3. Flexibility and Work-Life Balance<br>4. Time Management<br>5. Work Overload and Turnover<br>6. Experimentation and Strategy<br>7. Work Allocation and Fairness<br>8. Lifestyle and Freedom |

**Table 2**

*Common themes of Culture of Trust*

| AI/ Factor | Culture of Trust | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Define | *What is the meaning* | 1. Trust in Team Members<br>2. Confidence and Reliability<br>*3.* Responsibility and Accountability *"Everyone is responsible for their own duties without having to find fault later."*<br>4. Understanding and No Bias<br>5. Empowerment and Delegation |
| Discovery | *What is the best experience* | 1. Trust and Independence *"Let me handle my job without intervention."*<br>2. Challenging Work and Growth<br>3. Effective Communication and Client Interaction<br>4. Team Collaboration and Success<br>5. Opportunity and Belief in Capability |
| Dream | *What would you like to see in future* | 1. Trust and Responsibility<br>2. Communication and Openness<br>3. Respect and Understanding<br>4. Team Effectiveness and Quality Work *"Emphasis on the team to work effectively."*<br>5. Support and Growth |
| Design | *How to achieve it* | 1. Trust and Integrity *"Trust takes time. Time will build trust but can be shattered in a second."*<br>2. Collaboration and Teamwork<br>3. Open Communication and Listening *"Tell the truth, listen to opinions."*<br>4. Personal Development and Growth<br>5. Problem-Solving and Learning from Experience<br>6. Acceptance and Respect for Differences |
| Delivery | *What would be the changes or impact* | 1. Teamwork and Collaboration *"We should be able to get better together. Develop into a good, capable team together."*<br>2. Smooth Workflow and Efficiency<br>3. Trust and Mutual Respect<br>4. Growth and Development<br>5. Focus on Quality and Success<br>6. Weeding Out Non-Contributors |

**Table 3**

*Common themes on Self-transcendence*

| AI/ Factor | Self-transcendence | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Define | *What is the meaning* | 1. Respect and Acceptance *"Acceptance by others, respect our identity. We will feel seen, we will feel that we are worth it."* <br> 2. Mutual Understanding and Trust <br> 3. Value and Encouragement <br> 4. Diversity and non-judgmental <br> 5. Fairness and Equality <br> 6. Importance of Working Together |
| Discovery | *What is the best experience* | 1. Expression of Opinions and Listening *"Everyone in the team dares to express their opinions and can discuss and debate to find knowledge."* <br> 2. Team Support and Problem-Solving <br> 3. Building Trust and Relationships <br> 4. Appreciation and Recognition <br> 5. Challenging Work and Responsibility <br> 6. Understanding and Acceptance *"When the member of the team understands that we are not good at talking and not a social person."* |
| Dream | *What would you like to see in future* | 1. Trust and Open Communication *"Everyone will feel safe to speak out."* <br> 2. Collaboration and Teamwork <br> 3. Continuous Learning and Knowledge Sharing *"Learn new things all the time because everyone exchanges what they know to share with each other."* <br> 4. Respect and Acceptance <br> 5. Problem-Solving and Improvement <br> 6. Team Connection and Belonging <br> 7. Confidence and Empowerment |
| Design | *How to achieve it* | 1. Listening and Open Communication <br> 2. Encouragement and Space for Expression <br> 3. Team Support and Relationship Building *"Support the team to have a relationship with support by questioning or sharing the ideas for idea exchange."* <br> 4. Skill Development and Encouragement <br> 5. Bias Reduction and Considering Other Perspectives <br> 6. Action and Problem-Solving |
| Delivery | *What would be the changes or impact* | 1. Expressing Opinions and Clarity *"Expressing more opinions creates clarity about who thinks what."* <br> 2. Team Strength and Development <br> 3. Trust and Coordination <br> 4. Creativity and Quality *"When the team is a safer place to express opinion and identity, the work will have more quality and creativity."* <br> 5. Decision-Making and Confidence <br> 6. Efficient Work and Error Detection |

**Table 4**

*Common themes on Meaningful work*

| AI/ Factor | Meaningful work | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Define | *What is the meaning* | 1. Meaningful Work and Impact *"I feel that meaningful work has a very impact on people and the organization, including happiness and satisfaction of work."* <br> 2. Happiness and Satisfaction <br> 3. Work-Life Balance <br> 4. Responsibility and Duty <br> 5. Efficiency and Client Satisfaction <br> 6. Achievement and Pride *"Being able to see results, both tangible (financial rewards) and intangible (sense of achievement in rising up to the challenge)."* |
| Discovery | *What is the best experience* | 1. Career Growth and Development <br> 2. Value of Work and Experience *"It is valuable in growing your career further because it is a specialized field of work and will be beneficial to future work."* <br> 3. Skill Improvement and Learning <br> 4. Happiness and Personal Satisfaction <br> 5. Uncertainty and Work Perception |
| Dream | *What would you like to see in future* | 1. Continuous Learning and Skill Development <br> 2. Quality Work and Client Satisfaction *"Deliver the quality work to client for the reputation of the company."* <br> 3. Improvement and Management <br> 4. Value Addition and Innovation <br> 5. Team Growth and Responsibility |
| Design | *How to achieve it* | 1. Encouragement and Recognition *"Saying words of encouragement, thanking, and complimenting each other."* <br> 2. Effective Communication and Feedback <br> 3. Clear Goals and Leadership <br> 4. Team Participation and Collaboration <br> 5. Delivering Quality Work |
| Delivery | *What would be the changes or impact* | 1. Work-Life Balance and Personal Growth *"When life at work is valuable, you can pass-forward this value to your personal life as well."* <br> 2. Skill Development and Learning <br> 3. Adaptability and Change <br> 4. Career Growth and Success <br> 5. Meaningful Work and Determination <br> 6. Challenges and Career Uncertainty |

**Table 5**

*Common themes on Transparent Communication*

| AI/ Factor | Transparent Communication | Themes |
|---|---|---|
| Define | *What is the meaning* | 1. Straightforward and Honest Communication *"Straightforward communication, the receiver received the message clearly. There is no other connotation."* <br> 2. Clarity and Understanding <br> 3. Respect and Boundaries <br> 4. Team Unity and Collaboration <br> 5. Feedback and Personal Development |
| Discovery | *What is the best experience* | 1. Open Communication and Feedback <br> 2. Problem Solving and Decision Making <br> 3. Respect and Understanding <br> 4. Team Collaboration and Support *"Can talk and tell, share stories to develop individuals or teams by listening to each other."* <br> 5. Comfortable and Relaxed Communication |
| Dream | *What would you like to see in future* | 1. Clear and Effective Communication <br> 2. Honest Sharing and Respect *"Talking and sharing opinions honestly by showing respect to others as well."* <br> 3. Open Space for Expression <br> 4. Problem Solving and Understanding <br> 5. Feedback and Continuous Development |
| Design | *How to achieve it* | 1. Open and Honest Communication *"Just communicate honestly."* <br> 2. Understanding and Listening <br> 3. Clear and Effective Communication *"Communicate clearly and get to the point, avoid the work that might cause confusion or misunderstanding."* <br> 4. Team Collaboration and Support <br> 5. Addressing Differences and Gaps |
| Delivery | *What would be the changes or impact* | 1. Team Collaboration and Harmony *"Team members are more harmonious with each other and work together to depend on each other."* <br> 2. Shared Understanding and Communication <br> 3. Trust and Confidence <br> 4. Smooth and Effective Workflow <br> 5. Value and Happiness in Work |

**Table 6**

Common themes

| Factors | Common Theme |
|---|---|
| Intergeneration<br>*What does intergeneration mean to you?* | 1. Generational Differences and Age *"People in each generation experience various situations…it molds the views, attitudes, and behavior of people in each age group."*<br>2. Communication and Collaboration<br>3. Experience, Knowledge, and Mentorship<br>4. Relationships and Socialization<br>5. Attitudes, Values, and Perspectives |
| Collaborative Culture<br>*What does collaborative culture mean to you?* | 1. Teamwork and Collaboration *"Everyone listens to each other, helps each other, and comes together as one to get one job done."*<br>2. Shared Goals and Common Objectives<br>3. Support and Assistance<br>4. Communication and Understanding<br>5. Fairness and No Exploitation<br>6. Managing Cultural and Personality Differences |
| Team Engagement<br>*What is your meaning of team engagement?* | 1. Active Participation and Involvement *"Everyone on the team is involved."*<br>2. Open Communication and Idea Sharing<br>3. Collaborative Task Allocation and Support<br>4. Equality and Mutual Respect<br>5. Trust and Shared Responsibility |
| Strengths of the team<br>*What are the 3 best strengths of your team?* | 1. Team Support and Collaboration<br>2. Knowledge Sharing and Development *"Sharing of experience and knowledge at all times to make everyone ready to develop themselves."*<br>3. Empathy and Understanding<br>4. Leadership and Guidance<br>5. Goal Achievement and Proactivity<br>6. Communication and Expression<br>7. Flexibility and Adaptability<br>8. Competency and Skills<br>9. Respect and Fairness |
| Dream Team<br>*What would be a dream team in your idea?* | 1. Respect and Understanding<br>2. Collaboration and Teamwork<br>3. Communication and Sharing<br>4. Flexibility and Adaptability<br>5. Leadership and Support<br>6. Work Culture and Environment *"Feeling like, what we are doing now fits the culture of work, family, and team support."*<br>7. Opportunity and Growth |
| Other Recommendations | 1. Building a Positive Team Culture<br>2. Value and Career Development<br>3. Adaptability and Embracing Change<br>4. Right Person in the Right Role |

The results based on the common themes generated indicated that:

The dominant themes for work flexibility are flexibility and autonomy where employee (team member) is allowed to manage their tasks and schedules or called task management. Better work flexibility helps to improve better communication and management and promotes work happiness and motivation. This means being connected and informed even if team member works from home. Flexibility improvement refers to team building and focusing on fostering better team relationships.

The themes generated showed that trust means mutual belief and respect that the team members can get the job done. Trust and responsibility are related themes. However, integrity is essential to improve the trust in the team, Self-Transcendence was defined as respect and acceptance of various opinions, identities and differences. To increase degree of self-transcendence of the team, the listening and open communication is important

Meaningful work was perceived as the impact that work contributes to both personal fulfillment and career advancement. In addition to the meaning and impact, the happiness and satisfaction at work also being defined as meaningful work. The meaningful work can be measured by career growth and development, from the participants point of view and experience, if they are doing right, they will see the result in career growth. Having a meaningful work will benefit on team member's continuous learning and skill development and improve quality of work and client satisfaction. Based on the study, to make the team member to know that the work that they are doing is meaningful; the encouragement and recognition is recommended. Lastly, Transparent Communication was defined as straightforward and honest communication that fosters better understanding. Improve of the transparent communication can improve the team to have honest sharing and respect of each other's opinions and views.

Presently, the organization implements workplace flexibility and team members aspire to create a collaborative culture via the communication and coordination between team members. The team members want greater trust in each other and trust in their ability and sense of responsibility. Being respectful and sharing ideas is one common key theme from self-transcendence that is key to create the opportunities for open communication. Meaningful work is measured by career growth and development, adds value to life and happiness. Straightforward and honest communication involves having open and clear communication that fosters mutual understanding.

The "CREWS" Strategy was generated from the common themes on five factors of the study; Work Flexibility, Trust, Meaningful work, Self-transcendent, and Transparency Communication. The components of the "CREWS strategy are :

C: Communication and connection:  improving work flexibility, connection and communication will enhance teamwork and coordination.

R: Respect:  team member respect each other's' opinions and ideas will foster an environment for continuous learning .

E: Employment and Delegation:   the trust in each team member's ability and responsibility.

W: Work-life value integration, is the integration generated from the meaningful work that creates value.

S: Straightforward and honest communication: seeking to foster better communication for better team understanding,

This CREWS strategy will help the team to create the collaboration as an organizational practice.

The CREWS strategy may be implemented as follows:

Connection and Communication:  a 'connection day' where team members share some short activity together such as having meal by bringing in the food along face-to-face meeting.

Respect and Express:  provide a social networking space where team members can share and express their opinions, and ask questions.

Empowerment and Delegation: establish an 'SOS' call help desk to support the team members who may need help or advice. Trust them to do their job, but always support them if they needed.

Work-Life Value integration: create a virtue board to motivate the team members to put on the memo of their thoughts on work value experience to create a better awareness of the values in the workplace.

Straightforward and Honest communication:   Increase the communication channels fo r feedback.

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