„Our status reports are the most important deliverable" or: What project managers do not know

How to reflect expectations, perceptions and different perspectives in lessons-learnt-workshops

I was asked by a project lead to support the teams' lessons-learnt-workshop in January. The new year was supposed to be a good opportunity to have a look at the recent co-operation with the team and to strengthen it for the upcoming year.

We designed a workshop format for the day where we were supposed to talk also about critical developments. The project lead assumed some problems in the day-to-day co-operation which he felt but could not really specify.

Part of the workshop has been executed by the help of the *Elephant in the room* cards to make sure we had a good start including the exchange of perceptions and perspectives. Every member of the team assembled around the table where the cards were already placed top down. The procedure is easy: The first person takes a card, reads it out loud and shares his or her thoughts with the team (how true and relevant is this for our team), followed by a discussion with the whole team.

In our workshop we first of all had the card *"It is more efficient to multi-task during a meeting."* Reading out loud raised a smile on nearly everyone's face in the room but also raised eyebrows. "Sorry to say: This is true. We have so many meetings that we only have the chance to reply on mails during these meetings. By the way: Not everything mentioned in these meetings is relevant or interesting." We had a short but intense discussion on that resulting in the decision to change the meeting culture, at least within this team. So the topic "Increase efficiency of meetings" is one thing the team put on their agenda for the day.

After that the next person took a card: "Our status reports are our most important deliverable.". Also this seemed to be familiar to the participants. One team member said: "This is absolutely true for our team! On a Thursday afternoon we do nothing else but preparing the status report. All the other things have to wait." The project manager was astonished by this statement. Not only he, of course, did not want his team members to stop working for a report. He also did not know that his colleagues thought that this would have been his expectation. His priority had never been the status report at all and he thought, until that day, that his team would think alike and act accordingly. He immediately took the chance to fix that and they decided to work later that day on the teams' priorities.

These were only two cards of some more we discussed and we found some interesting perspectives and perceptions on the topic of co-operation. **We managed to talk about topics that are most relevant for the day-to-day-business but which never have been spoken about during the daily routines.**

For more information about the cards please click here: www.cairos-consulting.de/elephant