

Henry tam and the mgi team case study essay sample

[Business](#), [Management](#)



The team that Henry Tam worked with on the MGI project was a disparate group with very different skill sets and perspectives on the project. The goal of the project, to create and market a piece of software designed to help people better understand music and create it, began with a small group. This group was soon supplemented by others, including Henry Tam and his team, who were attempting to win a Harvard Business School contest based on their work with MGI.

The 5 Whys

Ultimately, this project was a failure. The reasons for this failure are difficult to define, primarily because of the complex interactions of the various individuals over time. One way to glean a few answers as to why this project did not succeed is to use the 5 Whys method discussed in Systems Thinking. As suggested in this method, the first question to ask with regard to Henry Tam and the MGI project is why it failed to achieve its objectives? The initial answer to this seems to be that there was a lack of focus in the project. Why was there this lack of focus? Some of the original members of the group themselves had disagreements as to the ultimate goal for MGI.

There were two competing ideas for just what MGI should do. On the one hand, it was suggested that the software they were going to create should be used and marketed as a kind of game, while the other opinion was that it should be marketed as an educational aid. This led to considerable argument. The three founders seemed to see nothing wrong with the constant contention in meetings. Sasha states, “ That’s just the way it is. We

work and we fight.” (Polzer 4). The three of them seem to think this was the natural order of things in the business environment.

Why did Tam and his team fail to get the members of the group to agree to a single concept and approach? It seems clear that Tam and his group were viewed by Sasha as mere consultants and business plan writers. This was made plain in the very earliest e-mail he sent them, in which he made it plain that he wanted them to simply write a business plan (Polzer 6). Why wasn't it possible to coalesce the competing voices and opinions at the table into a single objective and plan? When reviewing the situation, it seems obvious that there was no single leader in the room.

Without a single leader to take in the various viewpoints and make a final decision, the project could not come together. Why was there no single leader in the room? The reason for this is purely psychological. The egos of the individuals who originally came up with the concept of MGI would not allow them to yield the leadership position in the room to anyone else, including Tam and his team. Eventually Tam and Dana found they had to work around Sasha's objections by first having Dana propose something that they knew Sasha would disapprove of, to be followed by something that Tam would propose that they actually wanted (Polzer 8).

The Story

The story of how things went wrong with MGI begins with the slow and unsteady recruitment of disparate individuals to the project. The three original members, Igor, Sasha and Roman, already disagreed with each other

about the direction of the project. As new members to the group were slowly introduced, including Tam and his group, things seem to become more unfocused rather than less so. While the addition of more voices at the table might seem like a way to end the disagreement about the direction of the project, it instead resulted in more opinions and the creation of groups within the group, each working in opposition to the other.

This made getting beyond the first step of deciding exactly what they were doing, creating a game or an educational tool, very difficult. In the end, the failure of MGI comes down to the unwillingness of the various members of the team to agree to having a single leader of the group. Tam and his team were viewed by Sasha as entirely ancillary, little more than office assistants.

In his turn, Sasha was extremely sensitive to any perceived slights in which he felt his opinions were being ignored. In one meeting where Tam's group had a PowerPoint presentation, Sasha felt that, "... I was producing material for the meetings, but it wasn't being used much. This was another big frustration of mine" (Polzer 10). This lack of leadership by a single individual was what ultimately doomed the effort.

What Could Have Been Done Differently?

While Tim and his team did not succeed, much of the blame for this failure has to be laid at the feet of the three original members of the group. Sasha, Roman and Igor were the ones fundamentally responsible for MGI, since it was their conception to begin with. Thus, they needed to make decisions from the very beginning that made success at least possible. One way that

this could have been accomplished would've been by appointing a single individual to be the leader. While this would have required at least two of them putting their egos aside, it would have made many of the later problems less likely (or at least, much more easily solved).

Although group brainstorming sessions are valuable, in the end there has to be a single individual with the authority to force a consensus and a final decision. Another possibility would have been for these three original founders to agree to abide by the suggestions proposed by Tam and his team. Instead, there was confusion from the very beginning as to the role that Tam and his team would play. Had Sasha, Roman and Igor agreed to accept the recommendations of Tam and his team, this would have eliminated the lack of focus that was the major impediment to success for MGI.

Works Referenced

Hill, Linda. "Managing Your Team." Harvard Business School. October 13, 1996. Polzer, Jeffrey T., Ingrid Vargas, and Hillary Anger Elfenbein. "Henry Tam and the MGI Team." Harvard Business School Case 404-068, October 2003. Senge, Peter M. *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies and Tools for Building a Learning Organization*. New York: Currency, Doubleday, 1994.