

# Making it Safe to Disagree

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A provocative **Fast Company** article by Adrian Costick and Chester Melton (authors of **The Best Team Wins: The New Science of High Performance**) is titled **Your Team Members Need to Disagree More, Here is How to Help Them**. According to the article, the most effective teams have regular, intense debates. Yet most company leaders and workers prefer a harmonious work environment.

Research shows that harmony undermines innovative thinking. The challenge is how to support your team in disagreeing productively.

## • Diversity Adds Complexity



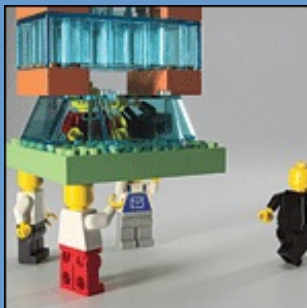
A German workshop participant shared that there is a German word, *Sachlichkeit*, or "objectivity", that separates opinions or ideas from the person saying them.

Erin Meyer, Affiliate Professor of Organizational Behavior at INSEAD, says Confucian societies, such as China, Korea and Japan, share the concept of *miazai*, or "face". "In China, protecting another person's face is more important than stating what you believe is correct."

In contrast, French and German students are taught from a young age to disagree openly. French students are taught to reason via thesis, antithesis and synthesis, building up one side of the argument, then the other, before coming to a conclusion. Germans can debate a position without disapproving of the person.

Meyer summarizes: Germans, French, Dutch and Danish are on the confrontational side of disagreeing; Americans are generally less direct with negative feedback rather than the confrontational style; and Chinese, Japanese, Thai and Indonesian consider it rude to disagree.

## • Ground Rules for Healthy Debate



It is no small coincidence that Costick and Melton's ground rules, appearing in a 2018 article are very similar to LEGO SERIOUS PLAY etiquette drafted almost 20 years ago. And LSP can more predictably insure that everyone participates equally.

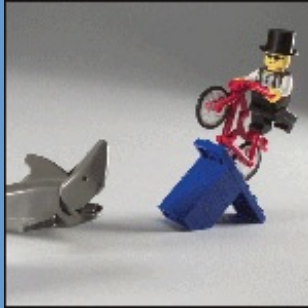
Costick and Melton tell us debate and disagreement are healthy for teams. Debate unearths the best solutions. Typically, teams feel more closely bonded when they trade a wide range of ideas and perspectives. Isn't the major point of diversity and inclusion to bring together people with differing opinions?

They suggest some useful ground rules for facilitating heated conversations:

- Treat each other with respect, and challenge the position, not the person.
- Listen to one another carefully before responding, and ask for clarification if needed. Gather facts; don't jump to conclusions.
- Come to the debate ready to present facts and data, not suppositions.
- Do not compete to "win." Debates are a chance to find and test the best ideas and to learn, not to score points.
- After the team makes a decision collaboratively, everyone needs to respect and support it, even if they have their own reservations.

## • Safely Translating Feelings into Words and Stories

Most of us know, intuitively, that art and music are forms of



We have found that building models using LEGO SERIOUS PLAY is a similarly powerful way to access and express deep emotion.

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expression often described as "beyond words". You can access deep feelings, sometimes feelings you did not even realize you had, by drawing a picture or writing a poem. These are solitary pursuits. LSP is a group activity which accesses deep emotions.. And by referencing a LSP model with its own identity, the model distinctly separate from the builder, the builder has the freedom to safely objectify his feelings.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. Rasmussen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter 'R' being particularly large and stylized.

Rasmussen Consulting specializes in using LEGO SERIOUS PLAY to effectively harvest an organization's collective intelligence to enhance strategic behavior for better and faster decision-making. We are based in Denmark with offices in US, Japan and Singapore. [www.rasmussenconsulting.dk](http://www.rasmussenconsulting.dk).