

The Social Immune System

The Science of Strengthening and Diagnosing Project Team Health

Understanding a project team is not a matter of its structure but of how it thinks and behaves as a living system. Beneath the org chart and the status reports, a team's real behavior is driven by how information moves, how people make sense of uncertainty together, and how the group senses and responds to risk. Drawing on my research into how project leaders think and decide, this session introduces the organization as a social immune system—a way of reading a team from the inside, where its true health and its exposure to risk are determined, and catching dysfunction before it reaches cost or schedule. It then turns from diagnosis to leadership: how the strongest project leaders sharpen their own judgment and draw out the collective intelligence that lets a team perform beyond the sum of its parts.

Major Subjects Covered

- **The team as a living system** — why the org chart shows structure but never behavior, and how to read the system beneath it.
- **Reading the vital signs** — interpreting communication, stand-ups, and status reports as diagnostic signals of team health.
- **Threat detection and the self / non-self problem** — sensing genuine risk before it reaches cost or schedule, and telling it apart from healthy friction.
- **Cognitive diversity as detection capacity** — why diverse, independent thinkers sense danger that homogeneous teams miss.
- **Autoimmunity and groupthink** — how teams punish dissent and suppress concerns, and how the signs appear early in communication.
- **Two kinds of leadership thinking** — the quality of a leader's own judgment, and the thinking they draw out of others under pressure.
- **Unleashing collective intelligence** — calibrating intelligent risk and building the conditions that lift performance beyond the sum of the parts.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this program, participants will be able to:

1. Read a project team as a living system, interpreting communication and group behavior as diagnostic signals of health and risk.
2. Apply the social immune system framework to detect threats and early cultural breakdown before they reach cost, schedule, or scope.
3. Recognize groupthink and suppressed dissent, and explain why cognitive diversity strengthens a team's ability to detect risk.
4. Identify the factors that strengthen or undermine judgment in high-stakes decisions, and calibrate intelligent risk under pressure.
5. Recognize the leadership behaviors that draw out a team's collective intelligence and elevate performance.

Program Information

Field of Study: Business Management & Organization

Program Level: Intermediate to Advanced

Prerequisites: At least one year of PM experience

Advance Preparation: None

Delivery Method: Group Live (also available Group Internet Based)

Recommended CPE Credits: 1–4, based on session length

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