

MANAGING IN A TEAM ENVIRONMENT: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES (Insights from Scholarly Evidence available from Research Studies)

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ABSTRACT

All of us are members of multiple teams—at work, at home, and in the community. Teams are becoming increasingly prevalent in the workplace as they have been shown to be powerful tools to improve the performance of individuals and organizations. Consequently, it is important to become proficient in leading and participating in teams. An attempt is made in this literature-based Paper to review three types of team skills: diagnosing and facilitating team development, leading a team, and being an effective team member. And the relationship of these key competencies to high performing team performance is illustrated. However, all these skills require some modification in different international settings or with teams comprised of international members (Trompennars & Hampen-Turner, 1998). It is hoped that every manager would hone his ability to perform each of these skill activities competently and become skillful team leader.

Keywords: Effectiveness; Credibility; SMART Goals; Everest Goals; Task-facilitating, Roles; Relationship-building Roles, Unproductive Roles; Feedback, and Team Building.

I. INTRODUCTION

Intact work teams and all other team configurations are recognized as central to accomplishing work in organizations. They are considered as the basic building blocks of organizations. When teams function well, individuals and the total organization function well. Further, team culture can be collaboratively managed to ensure organizational effectiveness. Today's organizations increasingly use *ad hoc* teams that perform a specific task and disband when the task is completed. The current method for getting complex tasks done in organizations is to assemble a cross-functional team comprised of members from all the functional specialties required to get the job done, such as design, engineering, manufacturing, and procurement. Such an arrangement would do away with the earlier negative results such as loss of synergy, wasted time, much rework, and considerable antagonism among separate functional specialists.

In Liberation Management, Tom Peters predicts that the work of tomorrow (most of which will be “brain work”) will be done by *ad hoc* teams brought together to accomplish a task, and then disbanded with the people going on to new tasks. Tom Peters uses the terms *multifunctional projectization* and *horizontal systems* to describe these teams and their work. Temporary, multifunctional, constantly shifting teams will be the dominant configuration for getting work done.

The thesis of Liberation Management is that contemporary bureaucratic structures with their functional specialization and rigid hierarchies are all wrong for the demands of today's fast-paced marketplace. The skill and competencies required to work effectively in teams will be at a premium in such a world.

II. MANAGERS IN THE ROLES OF LEADER AND A MEMBER OF A TEAM

Managers in the role of '*leader in a team*' know how to establish credibility and influence team members. They behave congruently with their stated values and demonstrate a high degree of integrity. They are always clear and consistent about what they want to achieve. They create positive energy by being optimistic and complimentary of others. They build a common base of agreement in the team before moving forward with task accomplishment. They encourage and coach team members to help them improve. They share information with team members and encourage participation. They articulate a clear, motivating vision of what the team can achieve, along with specific short-term goals.

The same managers while in the role of '*team members*' are knowledgeable about a variety of ways to facilitate task accomplishment in the team. They also know a variety of ways to help build strong relationships and cohesion among team members. They confront and help to overcome negative, dysfunctional, or blocking behaviors by others. They shift roles from facilitating task accomplishment to helping build trusting relationships among members, depending on what the team needs to do to move forward. When managers desire to make their team perform well, regardless of whether they are leaders or members of a team, they are fully aware of and knowledgeable about the different stages of team development experienced by most teams. They help establish clear expectations and purpose as well as help team members feel comfortable with one another at the outset of a team. They encourage.

III. DEVELOPING CREDIBILITY FOR LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS

Giving directions, articulating goals, or trying to motivate team members are all wasted efforts if the team leader has not established credibility and respect. Leader's influence and trust are the two components of credibility. Of course, there are additional behaviors that the leaders can use to help establish their credibility in a team. Team members will not follow a person whom they don't trust, who is hypocritical or dishonest, or whose motives appear to be personal aggrandizement instead of the welfare of the team. In fact, **Posner and Kouzes (1987)** identified credibility as the single most important requirement for leadership effectiveness.

Effective leaders have the respect and commitment of team members. That is, they develop credibility (**Kouzes & Posner, 1987**). Establishing credibility and the capacity to influence team members are the first key challenges faced by leaders of teams. Except in rare circumstances (e.g., in a crisis), leading a team by command or direct control is much less effective team leading through influence and indirect control (**Druskat & Wheeler, 2000**); **Hackman, 1987**). Hence, we need to focus on ways that one can be effective by working with team members rather than working on team members.

Once credibility has been established, then goals for the team can be articulated and the team can move toward high performance. Generally, team leaders build credibility with their team members by (i) by demonstrating integrity, representing authenticity, and displaying congruence, (ii) being clear and consistent about what they want to achieve, (iii) creating positive energy by being optimistic and complimentary, (iv) building a base of agreement among team members before moving on, with focus on task accomplishment, (v) managing agreement and disagreement among team members by using one-sided and two-sided arguments appropriately-one-sided in situations when all team members agree and two-sided when consensus is not preexisting, (vi) encouraging and coaching team members to help them improve, and (vii) sharing information about the team itself, providing perspective from external sources, and encouraging participation. Whereas these simple and straightforward seven behaviors are keys to build and maintain credibility and influence among team

members, much scholarly evidence exists that support their efficacy (Cialdini, 1995; Druskat & Wheeler, 2000; Hackman, 2003; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Kramer, 1999; Manz & Sims, 1987; Turner, 2000).

IV. ESTABLISHING SMART GOALS AND EVEREST GOALS FOR TEAMS

Once team members have confidence in the leader, it is then possible for that leader to identify goals that the team can achieve and levels of performance to which team members can aspire. **Katzenbach & Smith (1993)**, in an outstanding study of high-performing teams, reinforced this point of view: The best teams invest a tremendous amount of time and effort exploring, shaping, and agreeing on a goal that belongs to them collectively and individually....with enough time and sincere attention, one or more broad, meaningful aspirations invariably arise that motivate teams to provide a fundamental reason for their extra effort (p. 50).

There are two kinds of goals that characterize high-performing teams, and leaders must identify and espouse both kinds. Whereas these two kinds are obviously not the only skills that effective team leaders possess, without these two core capabilities, it is unlikely that the team they lead will be effective and successful. The first are called **SMART** (*Specific, Measurable, Aligned, Realistic, and Time-bound*) goals.

The purpose for establishing clear goals is to ensure that every person on the team can give a similar answer to the question: What are we trying to achieve? Leaders who clearly articulate the desired outcomes for and with the team are more likely to experience high performance from the team. In fact, goal-directed performance always exceeds performance disassociated with goals (**Locke, 1990**). Second are called Everest goals requiring extraordinary effort to achieve, and may be a little luck. They go beyond normal goal-setting and represent an ultimate achievement, an extraordinary accomplishment or a beyond-the-norm outcome. They are visionary, not just tactical or strategic, and they leave people better for having engaged in their pursuit. They are clear and compelling serving as a unifying focal point. They build team spirit, engage people, and create positive energy and excitement. It is stimulating as it connects to a profound passion. General Pagonis states that keeping the team members abreast of your actions, as well as the rationale behind those actions, puts everybody on an equal information footing. Information is power, but only if it is shared (**Pagonis, 1993, p. 88**).

V. TWO COMPETENCIES ASSOCIATED WITH TEAM MEMBERSHIP

Advantageous Roles: Playing advantageous roles and providing helpful feedback to others are the two main skills associated with team membership. Once again, these two skills are not complicated, but they have been found to be highly effective in helping team members foster team success (**Parker, 1996**). Work teams always face two main challenges—accomplishing the task that has been assigned and building unity and collaboration among team members. Members of a team enhance or inhibit these challenges at least as much as they can as the team leader. Some teams click well as they get results quickly and effectively, and are fun to be in. However, those dynamics don't happen by chance but depend on certain key roles played by team members. A great deal of research has been done on the power of group pressure and the influence of team members on one another. The classic **Solomon Asch Experiments (1951)** were among the first to highlight the influence of team members on one another. Two main types of roles exist that enhance team performance: task-facilitating roles and relationship-building roles (**Schein, 1976**). Task-facilitating roles are those that help the team accomplish its outcomes or objectives. Some of the most common task-facilitating roles are: direction-giving, information seeking, elaborating, urging, monitoring, process analyzing, testing reality, enforcing, and summarizing. They help the team work more efficiently and effectively in achieving its objectives. In most effective teams, one will find several members performing these task-facilitation roles. It is difficult for team

members to emphasize both types of roles equally, and most people tend to contribute in one area more than the other. Conversely, some team members tend to be more task-focused whereas others tend to be more relationship-focused.

In addition to task-accomplishment, high-performing teams also have a certain amount of interpersonal cohesion and collaboration. An overwhelming amount of evidence exists to suggest that high-performing teams are cohesive, interdependent, and have positive affect among team members (Cohen & Bailey, 1007; Druskar & Wolff, 1999; Gully, Divine, & Whitney, 1995; Mullen & Copper, 1994; Parker, 1996).

Relationship-building roles such as supporting, harmonizing, tension relieving, confronting, energizing, developing, consensus building, and empathizing are those that emphasize the interpersonal aspects of the team. They focus on assisting team members to feel good about one another, enjoy the team's work, and maintain a tension-free climate. These roles become especially imperative when disagreement is prevalent, tension is high, or team members are not contributing to the team's performance.

However, it is even more likely that team members will display other unproductive roles rather than inappropriately play task or relationship roles. Unproductive roles inhibit the team or its members from achieving what they could have achieved, and they destroy morale and cohesion. Dominating, over-analyzing, stalling, remaining passive, over-generalizing, fault finding, premature decision-making, presenting opinions as facts, rejecting, pulling rank, resisting, and deflecting are some of the common blocking roles and they have the potential to inhibit a team from efficiently and effectively accomplishing its task by crushing morale, destroying consensus, creating conflict, hampering progress, and making ill-informed decisions. Effective team members recognize when blocking roles are displayed, confront and isolate dysfunctional members, and provide feedback to those who are inhibiting effective team performance. Knowing the most effective ways in which feedback can be delivered is the second key competency of team members.

VI. PRINCIPLES FOR PROVIDING FEEDBACK TO TEAM MEMBERS

While no set of behaviors are guaranteed to be effective in every situation or with every individual, certain principles for providing feedback—usually negative feedback—have been found to be especially effective (Dew, 1998; Hayes, 1997; Yeatts & Hyten, 1998).

Some of them are: focus feedback on (i) behavior rather than persons, (ii) observations rather than inferences (iii) on descriptions rather than judgments, (iv) on behavior related to a specific situation, preferably to the “here-and-now,” rather than on abstract or past behavior, (v) on sharing ideas and information rather than giving advice, (vi) on the amount of information that the recipient can use, rather than on the amount one might like to give, (vii) on the value it may have to the receiver, not on the emotional release it provides for the feedback giver, and lastly (viii) on time and place so that personal data can be shared at appropriate times.

After all, it is not easy to provide feedback to someone who is behaving inappropriately or disruptively. Whereas it is much easier to provide positive feedback or give compliments, helping others correct their negative behavior or pointing out the dysfunctions of blocking roles is difficult. Most people are afraid of offending others, of making the problem worse, or of creating conflict that may destroy team unity.

VII. TEAM BUILDING: PUTTING TEAM WORK IN WORK TEAMS

The basic building blocks of organizations are *teams* and one of the basic building blocks of Organization Development (OD) is *team building*. When a team engages in problem-solving activities directed toward task

accomplishment, the team members build something together. It appears that the act of building something together also builds a sense of camaraderie, cohesion, and *esprit de corps*. The overall nature of team-building sessions is as follows: the initial improvement efforts should be task oriented rather than focused on interpersonal relations. It is usually safer, less resisted, and more appropriate in terms of the problems and opportunities identified by the client-organization. Consultants generally tend not to focus on team building per se; rather, they find that it occurs as a natural by-product of learning to solve problems in a group setting. However, consultants do not avoid interpersonal or team ineffectiveness issues if they are getting in the way of efficient and effective problem-solving.

An excellent statement of the team-building process is found in William Dyer's *Team Building: Issues and Alternatives*. He describes team building as a data gathering, diagnostic, action planning, and action taking process conducted by intact work teams. He says of the process, One underlying assumption regarding teams in organizations is that resources are available in the individuals in the work unit. They have the capability to address and deal with the questions centering on issues of declining performance and the problems behind the questions, if given the time, encouragement, and freedom needed to work honestly toward solutions. Team development in its best sense is creating the opportunity for people to come together to share their concerns, their ideas, and their experiences, and to begin to work together to solve their mutual problems and achieve common goals.

Bell and Rosenzweig conducted scores of team building workshops in an OD program and came to the following assessment that major ingredients involved in a team's building something together are the eight steps that they have identified. Their experience also leads them to the tentative conclusion that some relatively simple notions involving these eight steps underlie success. They are:

1. Get the *right people* together for
2. A *large block of uninterrupted time*
3. To work on *high-priority problems or opportunities* that
4. *They have identified* and that are worked on
5. *In ways that are structured* to enhance the likelihood of
6. *Realistic solutions and action plans* that are
7. *Implemented* enthusiastically and
8. *Followed up* to assess actual versus expected results.

VIII. CONCLUDING COMMENTS AND BEHAVIOURAL IMPLICATIONS

Effective teams (i) have interdependent members, (ii) help members be more efficient working together than alone, (iii) function so well that they create their own magnetism, (iv) do not always have the same leader, (v) members care for and nurture one another, (vi) have members who cheer for and bolster the leader, and, and (vii) have a high level of trust among members. High-performing teams have a list of attributes such as (a) performance outcomes, (b) specific, shared purpose and vision, (c) mutual, internal accountability, (d) blurring of formal distinctions, (e) coordinated, shared work roles, (e) initial inefficiency leading to efficiency, (f) extraordinarily high quality, (g) creative continuous improvement, (h) high credibility and trust, and (i) clarity of core competence. Members of the team have to engage themselves in and hone three competences viz., leading teams, team membership, and team development to perform each of these skills competently. Team leaders need to learn to diagnose the stage in which their team is operating in order to help facilitate team

development and perform their roles appropriately. They need to understand the key characteristics of the forming, norming, storming, and performing stages of team development.

They have to provide structure and clarity in the forming stage, support and encouragement in the norming stage, independence and exploration in the storming stage, and foster innovation and positive deviance in the performing stage. When leading a team, leader has to first develop credibility as a prerequisite to having team members follow him. Based on the established credibility, leader then has to establish two types of goals for and with his team: SMART goals and Everest goals. As a team member, by encouraging the performance of different roles, one has to facilitate (i) task performance in his/her team, (ii) the development of good relationships in the team. When encountering team members who block the team's performance with disruptive behaviors, every one has to confront the behavior directly and/or isolate the disruptive member. Last, leader has to provide feedback to unhelpful team members in the most effective manner possible.

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