

TEAMWORK AND LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Teamwork is currently used in most organizations to accomplish goals and promote change. However, teamwork is not always the perfect answer to a problem within a group or company. Organizational leaders can use teamwork to improve productivity, but they must understand how to use teamwork effectively. Leaders need to have a good knowledge of different stages of team forming, team training, and virtual teams. Properly using teamwork in organizations can help with change initiatives, improve employee morale and lower turnover. This research explored the different stages teams go through as well as the results from teamwork. Team training and leadership within teams are also discussed. Finally, the ways teams help organizational change and virtual teams are studied and reported.

TEAMWORK AND LEADERSHIP

Everyone has worked in a group before; a group is individuals interacting to share data so that each group member can accomplish his or her tasks (Lussier & Achus, 2013). Groups are often used in class work, where each individual student will take part of a project, complete his/her own section, and combine it to make one project. On the other hand, a fully integrated team would take each person's section, improve on it together, and make something better than each person could have done on his or her own. A team is "a unit of interdependent individuals with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose and set of performance goals and to common expectations, for which they hold themselves accountable" (Lussier et al., 2013).

Team Forming

Research has been done on teamwork over the years. One such researcher was Bruce Tuckman in 1965; he was one of the first people to define how groups are formed (Tuckman & Jensen, 2010). His first step is initial composition stage, individuals avoiding conflict and wanting to be accepted, characterizes this stage. The team focuses on getting to know one another and forming routines. Each member acts independently. The next step is consensus building stage where trust develops between team members, which leads to members challenging each other. Tensions build; some teams never develop past this stage. The third step is where teams develop unity of purpose; the team focuses on one goal and develops a mutual plan. All members must take responsibility and be willing to work for the goal. The final stage is action stage, the team can do the job effectively without supervision or conflict.

Other researchers have taken Tuckman's stages and developed their own theories of team forming; most seem to be a variation of the original. For example, Zurcher (1969) had the same stages with different names...orientation equals forming, catharsis equals storming, focus/testing equals forming, and purposive equals performing. Lacoursiere (1974) called them orientation, dissatisfaction, production, and termination while Spitz and Sadock (1973) put Tuckman's stage one and two together and created their own stages of

team forming (Stage One: anxiety and confusion; Stage Two: trust, cohesiveness and interdependence; Stage Three: anxiety about the end of the team). Braaten (1974) also put forth a model that included an initial phase lacking in structure; a second phase characterized by conflicts between subgroups; a work phase where norms are agreed upon and trust forms; and the final phase of termination. (Tuckman et al., 2010).

Charrier (1972) developed his own stages of teams that he called “Cog’s Ladder”. He theorized that teams must move through each stage before going on to another stage; in other words, it is not possible to skip a stage. His stages are the polite stage, the “why we are here” stage, the bid for power stage, the constructive stage, and the esprit stage. Much like Tuckman’s first stage, the initial stage involves team members avoiding controversy and wanting to be liked. Cliques may form at this stage, which will come into play during later stages. The quickest way to get through the initial stage is with nonverbal teambuilding; members will be able to communicate without the “noise” that interferes with verbal and nonverbal communication (Charrier, 1972 p. 31). The second stage normally sets up the objectives and goals of the group with active participation between the members. During the power struggle stage, the third stage, conflict arises when each member of the group tries to influence other members to his or her point of view. Cliques that formed during stage one will show their power in this stage by supporting one member in power. Roles are important in this stage; typically, a “harmonizer/compromiser” member will step forward as well as a “gatekeeper” (Charrier, 1972 p. 33). These members will try to get the group to move past stage three into stage four, which is the reasonable constructive stage. Team members become more open minded and realize that other members have the right to different values. The attitude in the group will change, especially with exercises in sharing, helping and listening to help the team move to the last stage. The final stage is collegial; many teams never reach this stage. The team is incredibly cohesive and unified. The group is intensely loyal to each other and able to put aside personal differences. They may want a symbol to show their pride of the team. The greater the accomplishment in stage four, the greater the esprit will be in stage five. Members must be willing to be vulnerable and risk being wrong. Charrier (1972) states that it is possible for teams to slide backward into a previous stage (usually with the addition of another member) but it is also possible to build back up into esprit.

TEAMWORK RESULTS

Research has shown that using teams in organizations can increase productivity and employee morale (Delarue, Hootegeem, Procter, & Burrige, 2008). Their study examined three hypotheses: teamwork is positively linked to organizational outcomes; this link can be explained by the impact of the team on employee attitudes; and organizational and environmental factors will play a role as well. Their research supports other studies and arrive at the same conclusion that performance is positively related to teamwork (Delarue et al., 2008). In addition, teamwork also increases an organization’s competitiveness financially. Finally, employee attitudes (such as commitment and motivation) and behavior (such as absenteeism and turnover) are impacted positively by teamwork (Delarue et al., 2008). Teamwork can make employees feel empowered by solving problems as soon as they occur rather than consulting with a manager; in this manner, teamwork can simplify the organizational structure of a business and reduce the number of supervisors. These group dynamics can also motivate employees by making them all work toward a common goal. Stagers, Garcia, & Nagelhout (2008) also found that teamwork can promote brainstorming which increases productivity; additionally, teamwork can take the different perspectives that each employee should help solve problems in an efficient manner.

Team Training

Using teamwork to strategically reach goals in today’s organizations means that managers must be willing to put the time into training teams. Rentsch, Heffner, and Duffy (1994) posit that each team member will rely on their own experience with teamwork as their “schema” and must be able to drop their past in order to work effectively with the team. Different members will bring different experience levels

with them to the team; managers must be aware of this and encourage members to share their experiences. For example, there are several stages of gaining knowledge: declarative (facts and rules), compilation (the relationship between the facts), and procedural (skill is innate). Team members who are at the procedural stage of knowledge will not relate as well to members at the declarative stage. Additionally, members with higher experience will show a better performance while those with lower experience will show more stress. Team training should be focused on the experience of the group to avoid miscommunication between members. Managers must be ready to help the team set goals, communicate, and use their skills (Rentsch et al., 1994). Staggers et al. (2008) also believed that team building is necessary. "We believe firmly that the most successful teamwork occurs after team building" (p.474). Teamwork should improve communication, especially as team members move through the team building process. Teamwork can be learned, but it requires instructions in team building as well as support (Staggers et al., 2008).

Teamwork and Leadership

Leadership can be a very important component in teamwork. Teams can either thrive or fail based on leadership; however, sometimes even the best leader cannot make the difference in a poor team (Sohmen, 2013). Effective leaders will try to promote the team's problem-solving skills while giving them the best opportunities. Sohmen (2013) states that leaders influence and motivate teams; they do not coerce; they achieve results by developing a shared vision and communicating it to the team whilst influencing with passion (p. 4). Therefore, the first step for an effective leader is to develop the vision and objectives for the team. He or she will establish each team member's roles and responsibilities while promoting independence. The leader should understand the culture of the team and attempt to strengthen the team with mutual encouragement and trust. Successful leaders also provide constructive feedback that focuses on specific behaviors (rather than a person) to build positive relationships and team unity. Sohmen (2013) found eight factors of the most productive leaders; they are: vision, integrity, communication, collaboration, creativity, goal orientation, empowerment, and team building (esprit). He reminds us that "it takes an effective communicator with charisma to motivate, mentor, inspire, and build a cohesive team, while being aware of the individuality and unique aspirations of each team member" (p. 10).

Nurmi (1996) states that there are four different styles of leadership in teams. The first type is dictatorial; this is a situation whereby the leader is in complete control and does not promote teamwork at all since s/he is the "dictator". This style of leadership can lead to teamwork "camouflaging" problems in autocratic organizations. The next style is compromising; the team will compromise on an average solution instead of the best solution. This leader is trying to please everyone and thinks that consensus in the group is more important than the team output. Integrative is the third style; every team member gains learning in this style; the team takes everyone's resources to blend them together. Integrative leaders must be active listeners who accept different views. They must take the time to get all the team's resources out in the open and integrate them into one unit. The only problem in integrative teams is the possibility of groupthink, which is when the group cannot accept criticism or any other viewpoints (Nurmi, 1996). The final style is synergistic, which means the team creates something more than any one member had before. Nurmi argues that this type of teamwork is not usually from intentional management but comes about spontaneously with the right group of people. Synergistic teams are innovative, with high enthusiasm, motivation, and commitment. They have been observed in many artistic teams, such as string quartets. Poor teamwork application will waste time and lead to lower morale when it doesn't produce anything (Nurmi, 1996).

Leaders also should fulfill a "coach" role in teamwork (Rosner, 2001). In his interview with Marshall Goldsmith (one of the top five executive coaches in the world), Rosner asks about the best way to coach teams. Goldsmith states three things should happen in coaching teams: ask the leader if she can let go of the past, be honest with feedback, and be supportive. The individual must be committed to his/her team and not focus on any past events. In addition, honest feedback is essential in leadership in general and especially in teamwork. Finally, the leader can say, "You are a successful person. My job is to help you further achieve your goals and objectives. But in order for you to do that, there are certain things you must do" (Rosner, 2001, p. 62).

Teamwork and Change

Leaders often must be a change agent through teamwork; however, Drew & Coulson-Thomas (1997) found that the benefits of teamwork during a change initiative are often exaggerated while the difficulties are underestimated. The proper team can promote change, but the organization needs to consider the tasks to be undertaken as well as possible barriers. Drew et al. (1997) list several “change roadblocks”, such as lack of sufficient senior management support and commitment; lack of clear vision, goals and objectives; inadequate training and skills development; unwillingness to allow teams necessary autonomy and decision-making powers; lack of team spirit; executive impatience and push for short-term results. They suggest several solutions. Leaders should encourage teams to have honest communication and analysis during the learning process. They should also adopt multiple views, such as looking at problems from several perspectives (different cultures, parts of the world, etc.). Knowledge needs to be exchanged freely for the benefit of all, with innovative learning techniques and new technology. Finally, executives and board members need to be involved in the teamwork process; and effective teamwork must begin at the top (Drew et al., 1997, p. 166).

Virtual Teamwork

Global organizations may face an entirely new model in teamwork - virtual teamwork. With the technology of today's world, team members do not even have to be on the same continent to work as a team. A study from Intel Corporation revealed that almost two-thirds of its employees are involved in teams that are located at different sites (Nunamaker, Reinig, & Briggs, 2009). However, there are several issues with this type of teamwork. Virtual team members may struggle with establishing relationships with their teammates; they also face problems with keeping their focus on their team and not on their workplace as well as having to incorporate the team into their daily routine.

Nunamaker et al. (2009) have several principles to help leaders with virtual teamwork barriers. The first principle is for leaders to adjust reward structures; it is easy to lose virtual team members through the old saying “out of sight, out of mind”. Therefore, leaders need to make the rewards with virtual work the same as for onsite work. Focus is another problem; with no face-to-face meetings, it becomes difficult to control focus on the work at hand. Technology is extremely helpful with this barrier. Team leaders can control what appears on each employee's screen with shared windows. Application sharing promotes sharing instantly, so that no effort is wasted in attempting to figure out what is said in an email or document. Virtual teams should have a “virtual presence” (p. 115); if team members are working together at the same time, their computers can display a list that has the active participants, or an audible cue when a team member joins in or leaves a session. If team members are working during different times (especially with global work during different time zones), it may be helpful to have each team member send an email or text to the others every time they add to the team effort. Global work also means that standards and terminology must be agreed upon; for example, members using the metric system need to make sure the entire team is using the metric system as well.

Another barrier to virtual teamwork can appear if the technology needed causes extra work for the members. For example, if team members must work late to collaborate or go to a separate room for video conference, they will often feel as if it is extra work and not worthwhile (Nunamaker et al., 2009). Team members should be able to use the same technology with their virtual teammates as they do with their local workmates, such as cameras, messaging, discussion and voting tools. Virtual work should be an instance of a person's regular work, not a separate, disjoint activity (Nunamaker et al., 2009, p. 116).

The final principles involve communication. Team building activities that build familiarity within the team should start immediately upon formation. When the team knows each other and trusts each other, it makes teamwork that much better. Team members need to be very explicit in their communication; with

no nonverbal cues to follow, it is easy to misinterpret an email or message, so members must be very clear. Additionally, member should use anonymity when appropriate as it can encourage honest communication. Research has shown that anonymous discussions tend to elicit more critical analysis of the topic under consideration, and reduce politically based decision making (Nunamaker et al., 2009, p. 115). Finally, the group must be able to self-facilitate independently.

CONCLUSION

Teamwork has been shown to improve productivity as well as increase employee morale. However, teamwork is not always appropriate. This paper explored types of team forming, results from teamwork, team training, leadership within teams, how teamwork can affect change, and virtual teams.

One of the best ways to improve teamwork is to follow four simple rules about ourselves (Ruiz, 1997). “Be impeccable with your word. Don’t take anything personally. Don’t make assumptions. Always do your best.” If everyone on a team including the leader would follow these agreements, teams can easily work together to accomplish each goal they set.

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