

Strategies in Team Building

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Background

There are a variety of strategies in team building and over the years, there has been considerable controversy on what are the best strategies to use when building teams. This is, perhaps, why so many teams have failed. Looking at the qualities of team leaders is another approach in explaining the success or failure of teams.

A growing literature on empowerment, self-management of teams and leadership suggests that the role of the leader or change facilitator is changing from planner and director to that of coach and supporter (C. F. Floyd, Gannon & Pauwe, 1996; Manz & Sims, 1993; Smith & Sims, 1995). Therefore, the assumption that the leader influences the organization's outcome primarily through their influence on strategy formulation may need to be reconsidered.

In other words, it was previously believed that all decisions were made, and had to be made, from the top down in an organization and that only management understood what was best for the organization. Now, there is growing evidence through research that those who work for and with that organization understand what works best with that organization and that decisions need to be reciprocal: top down, bottom up. To do this, there must be a team approach and everyone must be fully involved (Smith & Kofron, 1996).

The Qualities

The success of a team is often measured by both the cohesiveness of a team as well as the productiveness of the team. Members look for tangible results or outcome from the team, or from the organization and the team leader is judged based on these things (Bachiochi, Rogelberg,

O'Connor, & Elder, 2000). Some things that team leaders / change facilitators can expect to happen as a result of positive team-building include increased membership, increased opportunity for members, increased growth in the organization, increased morale, increased cohesiveness, increased interest and awareness of the organization, increased enthusiasm for the organization, increased attendance at gatherings, and overall increased participation.

Conversely, in organizations that have poor team-building, the opposite is true. Membership begins to decline, scapegoating occurs, enthusiasm for the organization decline, attendance at gatherings declines, and overall interests decreases. People simply find reasons not to be involved.

There are four general approaches to the study of leadership:

Behavioral (Blake & Mourton, 1964; Fleishman, 1953; McGrath, 1962; Stordill, 1974; Yukl, 1998) which discusses leadership in terms of what leaders do including the skills or functions that they serve as leaders in the organization.

The study of traits (Basis, 1985; Burns, 1978; 1977) looks at the personality characteristics that leaders possess which enable them to lead. “Charismatic and transformational leadership theories are just two examples” (Bachiochi, Rogelberg, O'Connor & Elder, 2000).

The social psychology approach (Dansereau, Graen & Haga, 1975; French & Raven, 1959; Hackman & Walton, 1976) view leadership as a relationship or social influence process. “This approach has been influenced greatly by the work in areas such as social facilitation/loafing (Latane, Williams, & Harkins, 1979), group cohesiveness, (Berkowitz, 1954),

group polarization (Pruitt, 1971; Stoner, 1961) and group think (1972)” (Bachiochi, Rogelberg, O’Connor, & Elder, 2000).

Lastly, situational leadership approaches (Evans, 1970; Fiedler, 1967; Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; House, 1971) view leadership as strongly contingent upon the environment in which the leadership is to occur. . The leadership is view as a strong interaction between the leader, followers and context.

It is important, then, to understand these concepts, the and the role of the leader to be able to determine the best strategies for the team because of the multiple variations of each organizational and/or team structure.

Role of the leader. “The major role of a leader is to guide and lead” (Williams, 1998). This may seem obvious, but how does this happen? The leader needs to be aware at all times of what is going on within his / her organization or team. “He must keep everyone focused on specific duties” (Williams).

Secondly, because change requires that the change requires the imparting of new information, the leader must ensure that members are provided the necessary information or training to meet the demands for that change. For example, leaders of an organization or team cannot expect that a newsletter or website will be developed by people who do not possess the skills to do the job or who do not desire to learn them, and those people should not be selected for that position regardless of how well liked or popular they may be. They would be better-served in other positions where they do possess the skills or desire to learn the skills. The members need to be provided opportunity to practice these new skills prior to actually being expected to perform them.

The leader needs to provide resources for each member to utilize and it is each member's responsibility to make use of all available resources to enhance their learning. Members need to understand that they cannot rely, solely, on any one leader to do everything for them nor can they learn all they need to know from one person.

Leaders need to be aware of issues that occur and are occurring within the team and/or the organization which are creating conflict. They need to act immediately and quickly to intervene, realizing that otherwise, these may spin out of control creating major problems for either themselves or for the organization resulting in hurt feelings, possible legal problems or ultimate dissolution of the organization.

“Change requires hard work from a person who finds ingenious ways to gather the commitment and energy needed for the change process—which is the function of the Group energizer or Engager” (Williams, 1998).

Strategies. Now that we understand the above concepts and the role of the leader, what are some strategies for making this happen, both as a team and in our organization?

1. Select your board and officers carefully. Your board and officers guide your organization. You want them to represent your organization well and to the highest possible extent. People who cannot represent and moderate their own lives are not likely to represent your organization, or, are likely to do likewise with your organization –patterns repeat and reflect.

2. Select team members who have, or want to learn, the skills.

3. Set goals. Many teams fail precisely because they have no goals. They want to do something, but they have no specific goals. Learn to set specific goals with specific objects; both long-term and short-term. Have deadlines for your goals and objects; then celebrate the accomplishments, with new goals as soon as each objective has been met.

4. Bust the blisters: When problems begin to form, end it immediately. It is essential for all leaders to have a list of people whom they know they can call for support and consultation. Even if you have to retract a decision to resolve something that will be a problem, it is better to do that than allow something to continue to grow and grow only to fester into a huge infection throughout your organization and destroy your team, or your organization. Ask yourself: How does this feel now? How will it feel to each person affected now, and in a year? What is the overall impact? If it is bad now, it will not likely get better later—that is merely a myth. Make it better now.

5. Communication: Communication cannot be over-emphasized. It is absolutely imperative to communicate in all ways: in person, phone, email, via website, and do so timely and respectfully. While each person has a slightly different need for, and style of, communication, communication is essential for effective team building.

6. Quick Intervention: An effective leader recognizes when fast intervention, regardless of whether it is a need or a problem, is needed.

7. Recognition: People like and need to be recognized for their contributions, work and even existence. Not one member of an organization has to be a member of your organization. Each member is there because he / she chooses to be. Conversely, each one could choose not to

be. Therefore, giving recognition of that fact is essential. Member / team incentives are equally essential.

8. An effective leader recognizes, and works with, issues of negative group think. What is group think? It is defined by Merriamwebster dictionary as “a pattern of thought by the group”. When a group begins to think in negative terms, the leader must be quick to intervene and strategize ways of turning the groupthink into positive, proactive groupthink; otherwise, it can quickly become destructive to the organization. Outside intervention or training can be effective, or motivational speakers at conventions, fun activities may help with this.

9. An effective team leader recognizes Group Polarization as well. Group polarization occurs when it becomes apparent that members are polarizing themselves against one or a couple members. Polarization is also referred to as scapegoating. This may serve a purpose for members who are angry or insecure. Nevertheless, it can be extremely hurtful to members who are being polarized against, and destructive to the organization. Strategies for dealing with this include immediate intervention from the leader through communication with sides, mediation, and the recognition that the member(s) being polarized against is the victim and the organization / team is at risk of failure if such behavior is permitted to continue.

10. Cultural Awareness: It is essential for leads to be aware of cultural needs and concerns of all members. Each member of the team needs to be included from his / her cultural standpoint. For example, it is no longer acceptable to plan conventions for predominately the white Christian heterosexual male and female population. Other factors including various racial-ethnicities, gay-lesbian, disabilities, age ranges, etc. must be included from a vast array of perspectives from food to social activities to religious or non-religious functions.

Conclusion

What makes a successful team? The Group Energizer is the leader. Whether it is of a team or an organization, the leader has a tremendous responsibility. Much of what the leader does is how the followers will follow.

Research shows that there are four types of leadership styles (Stewart and Manz (1995): overpowering, powerless, power building and empowered.

Overpowering (those who are coercive, punishing, and autocratic) and powerless leaders (those who are intermittent, directionless and distant) are least effective.

Stewart and Manz (1995) posited that the power-building leaders allowed teams to be self-managing by using behaviors such as guidance and encouragement, delegation, reinforcement, and culture development. Empowering leaders used behaviors such as modeling, boundary-spanning (networking outside the team / organization), and assisting (mentoring or coaching) which allowed teams to be self-leading.

In addition, knowledge of the change process, creativity, negotiation skills, and decision-making skills (Hackman & Walton, 1986) have been found to be essential to successful leadership.

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