

AN OVERVIEW OF TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

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What Is Team Effectiveness?

Hackman (as cited by Weil, 1995) cites three useful measures for team effectiveness. The measuring standards are 1) productive output that meets or exceeds standards, 2) social processes that maintain or enhance the capability of members to work together on team tasks, and 3) group experience that satisfies personal needs of group members (Weil, 1995). According to Cohen, Ledford, and Spreitzer (1996), work team effectiveness is defined as both high performance and employee quality of work life. The idea draws from sociotechnical theory, which states that both social and technical systems must be maximized for an optimally effective team.

Schwarz (1994) modified Hackman's work to specify three criteria necessary for effective groups. First, an effective group delivers output that meets or exceeds the standards of the group's stake holders. Second, the processes used to carry out the work allows members to work together effectively on current projects and on subsequent efforts. Finally, as a whole, the group experience must satisfy the needs of its members.

Tannenbaum, Salas and Cannon-Bowers (1996) define effectiveness as a combination of team performance in terms of outputs and the team's ability to grow and regenerate itself. Tannenbaum and colleagues (1996) cite some contextual prerequisites for team success. First, there must be a logical reason for using a team. Teams are not a panacea for every situation; if a task is better done individually, no team is needed. Second, management must demonstrate that they support the team. Third, the team must have the necessary resources to complete the task(s). Finally, the team's needs must be properly diagnosed. If the above assumptions are met, then a wide range of interventions are available to facilitate a move toward team effectiveness

To better understand team effectiveness, team performance is evaluated in terms of inter-team productivity and intra-team productivity. According to Mohrman, Cohen & Mohrman, Jr., (1995) team effectiveness is based on team performance, which is the extent to which the groups' productive output meets the approval of customers, interdependent functioning, which is the extent to which the team is inter-reliant on one another, and team satisfaction, which is the extent to which the team is satisfied with team membership.

Tannenbaum, Beard & Salas (as cited by Tannenbaum et al. 1996) created a model in 1992 to describe Team Effectiveness. This model is depicted in Figure 2. As shown in the model, team

effectiveness is seen in terms of inputs, throughputs, and outputs, with contextual characteristics in the background. Inputs include task characteristics, work structure, individual characteristics, and team characteristics. Throughputs include team processes and team interventions. The throughputs are the way the team interacts while converting inputs to outputs. Outputs include team changes, team performance, and individual change—all of which are indicators of team effectiveness. The contextual characteristics apart from the team are composed of organizational and situational components (Tannenbaum, Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 1996).

Components Necessary for Team Effectiveness

Kellett (1993) conducted a study comparing the group processes of effective and less effective work teams. Team effectiveness data was collected through member perceptions and expert raters (identified by the team). Team processes were measured by each team member completing West's Climate for Innovation questionnaire and Litwin and Stringer's Motivation Climate questionnaire. Results concluded that effective teams had 1) a more dramatic style of decision making, with decisions made in a forum which was interpersonally non-threatening, with encouragement of diverse thinking which facilitates more participation by members, 2) clearly defined and mapped out objectives with active engagement in setting goals and agreeing to objectives by the members, 3) an open attitude for change, 4) a shared concern for excellence in completing the task, 5) continued evaluation of performance, and 6) an intentional avoidance of "groupthink" in which team members tend to adopt a conforming, non-divergent pattern of thinking, 7) active work-related support, and 8) a recognition of the importance of risk-taking (Kellett, 1993).

Less effective teams tended to be over structured, with too many constraints on the way the teams were allowed to go about their work. More effective teams had minimized red-tape and lacked emphasis on formal organization and authority. An unexpected finding in Cohen, Ledford and Spreitzer's (1996) study indicated no difference between effective and non-effective teams in relation to levels of interpersonal warmth.

An effective team has high levels of integration and coordination. Members of effective teams believe in their own efficacy. Individuals possess the capabilities and the permission to effect the outcomes for which their team is directly responsible (Mohrman et al., 1995). Effective teams 1) participate in goal setting, 2) establish obtainable and measurable goals, and 3) reward in accordance with organizational expectations.

Research identifies the following elements operable in effective teams: an elevated goal, respect for the leader, group goals that take precedence over individual goals, candid communications, a collaborative climate, competent members who give each other feedback and reinforce individual progress, a results-oriented environment, a unified commitment, a standard of excellence, and external support with adequate resource allocation (Johnson & Johnson, 1997). Cohen et al. (1996) found support for three categories that predict team effectiveness: group task design, group characteristics, and employee involvement context. Cohen (1996) did not find support for encouraging supervisory behaviors as impacting team effectiveness.

Hoevemeyer (1993) identified the following five areas as significant to team effectiveness: 1) team mission, 2) goal achievement, 3) empowerment, 4) open, honest communication, and 5) positive roles and norms. The mission should be jointly developed and agreed upon by all members, and members should be given specific work assignments with defined scope and authority that are in alignment with the overall organizational mission and business strategy. Team empowerment, a commitment to open communication, and support by positive role-modeling, prepare the way for the team to implement plans that will result in goal achievement (Hoevemeyer, 1993).

Employees are empowered to forge ahead when the organization is structured so they have the necessary information, resources and support to enable them to combine the knowledge and skill within the team structure.. Hoevemeyer (1993) found that the most successful teams excel in all five of the cited areas of effectiveness. Thomas Griffin (1994) states five universal keys to effective teamwork that can be applied to any type of team. They are: 1) a clear shared understanding and purpose, 2) clearly defined roles and processes, 3) value added participation and cooperation, 4) interdependency, and 5) ongoing continuous improvement. Some of the key processes for effective teams, identified by Griffin (1994), include systems/approaches for generating information, organizing information, and making decisions about the information.

Goal Setting, Shared Understanding, Group Effort and Accountability

Team Effectiveness is directly related to the teams' establishment and implementation of operational goals. Research suggests that improved team performance is the result of a shared understanding of hard goals (Robbins, 1993). Members need clearly specific goals and continuous concrete feedback in relation to progress. The goals should support the team mission, organizational mission and business strategy (Hoevemeyer, 1993).

Hackman (1990 as cited in Bolman & Deal, 1992) found both "structural and human resource variables" that were critical to group effectiveness. Groups with a clear charge and clear deadlines did much better than those without. A common recipe for failure was to burden a group with a vague purpose, squishy deadlines, and fuzzy success criteria, and to instruct the team to work out the specifics (Bolman & Deal, 1992).

Hackman and colleagues (1990, as cited in Bolman & Deal, 1992) also found that some early wins often triggered a self-sustaining upward spiral in performance. A positive start produces a greater likelihood of success. Effectiveness of work groups is impacted by the level of effort group members expend on completing tasks, and the amount of knowledge and skill members bring into the group (Hackman as cited by Weil, 1995). Factors leading to effort expenditure include getting trustworthy feedback and socializing opportunities to enhance group synergy. As a team develops a shared, cohesive culture with its own rituals and customs, individual efforts often "go beyond a formal job'..." in which team synergy and loyalty encourages each person to commit to doing something of significance" (Bolman & Deal, 1992, p. 43). To enhance the depth and breadth of team knowledge and skills, targeted training programs are needed to supplement existing knowledge and skills. Teams that develop group interaction patterns that avoid inappropriate weighting of member contributions generally function more effectively (Weil, 1995).

Clemmer (1993) cites five organizational elements as stepping stones or stumbling blocks to team effectiveness. They are vision and strategic focus, values and culture, skills, alignment, and deployment. Vision broadens the context and focus to infuse work with meaning, purpose, and direction. Values and Culture provide a common ground for effective teamwork which is particularly influenced by senior management's modeling of a solid commitment to teams. Skills ranging in breadth and depth enable the team to continually enhance its abilities. Alignment fosters change within key systems including recognition and reward practices for team accomplishments. Deployment attends to the proper approach to initiating teams within an organization and structuring the organization to substantiate teamwork (Clemmer, 1993).

Manager Role in Team Effectiveness

Managers are crucial to the success or failure of a team. In effective teams, managers need to be prepared to serve as an internal consultant, visionary, experimenter, coach and educator. As an internal consultant, the manager helps identify problems through asking the team about obstacles. As visionary, the manager is the conduit for information from the outside world, such as top management's vision, the overall business plan, and the needs of customers (internal or external). As experimenter, the team leader helps the team design work-process to improvement performance. As coach, the leader acts as a trainer and observer, providing constructive feedback, as well as ensuring timely, meaningful rewards for desired team behaviors and combined performance. Finally, as educator, the team leader facilitates the discussion and implementation of lessons learned from the completion of projects which can strengthen the teams' abilities for future work (Antonioni, 1994).

Johnson and Johnson (1997) found that managers help create effective teams by providing 1) initial direction, 2) clarification of assignments, 3) performance feedback, 4) an attitude of trust in the team and team members, 5) a commitment to team framework, 6) current information, 7) take-charge leadership when appropriate, 8) reinforcement of team decision-making, 9) freedom to develop creative solutions and 10) support and recognition of cooperative efforts and attitudes.

In creating effective teams, managers should act as facilitators. Ehlen (1994) asserts that managers are needed to facilitate 1) shared understanding, 2) shared responsibility, 3) mutual influence and 4) task autonomy. Managers are often the primary link between the team and the top management, the business strategy and overall corporate objectives (Mohrman et al., 1995). Managers or cross functional team leaders are responsible for providing current, strategic two-way communications.

Mutual accountability is a bedrock to team effectiveness. Managers and team leaders are responsible for assisting teams in developing systems of evaluation to monitor team progress. The team leader may need to coach a newly formed team as to how to evaluate progress in the midst of a work project as well as facilitate hindsight evaluations upon completion of the project. Managerial team leaders assist in accessing targeted professional development and acquisition of new skills and abilities for teams as a unit and for team members individually. Rather than assume a "hands-off" or "hands-on" posture, team leaders coach team members in becoming respectful of personality differences and appreciative of differences in point of views (Ehlen,

1994). Effective managers 1) do not maintain personal responsibility for work assigned to team members, 2) do not monopolize team projects, and 3) do not control daily activities. An effective team leader will empower teams by encouraging all team members to share responsibility for collective performance (Anonymous, 1994).

Team Member Role in Team Effectiveness

Rocine and Irwin (1994) suggest that team effectiveness is dependent upon the presence of balanced roles within the team. Four task-oriented roles are identified as shaper, innovator, analyzer, and implementer along with four process-oriented roles as coordinator, networker, harmonizer, and gatekeeper. Members of more experienced teams often change roles dependent on the issue or tasks. Effective team members understand and commit to group goals, exhibit concern and interest in others, acknowledge and confront conflict constructively, listen to others, include others in decision making when appropriate, recognize and appreciate member differences, contribute ideas and solutions, appreciate the ideas of others, and encourage and appreciate comments about team performance (Rocine & Irwin, 1994).

Schwarz (1994) proposes a model that builds on the works of Richard Hackman, Eric Sundstrom, Kenneth DeMeuse, and David Futrell. The model is depicted in Figure 3. In this model, the organizational context, group structure, group process and group effectiveness work as a unified system to make team members function together effectively. The group facilitator (which may or not be the manager) is able to intervene in group processes to facilitate mid-course corrections from which the team can learn for future work. Subsequent chapters within this book will focus on the four core group processes of shared understanding, facilitative functioning, decision-making and goal setting.

Common Team Problems and Effective Points of Intervention

The Tannenbaum et al. 1992 (as cited by Tannenbaum et al. 1996) model suggests some possible causes for limited team effectiveness. Table I is a summary of some categories of variables, symptoms, and specific variables at the root of team problems. Knowing the root of the problem is the first step to intervention. Once the problem is identified, a wide variety of interventions become available to solve the problem(s) impacting effectiveness. Table II is a summary of interventions compiled by Tannenbaum et al. (1996) to promote team effectiveness. The authors refer the reader to Tannenbaum (1996) and references cited in Table II for assistance with targeted interventions. Every problem is different; therefore, interventions must be appropriate to the problem in order to produce resolution. As the old adage says, "To a person with only a hammer, everything looks like a nail." Competent practitioners need a full set of assessment and repair tools to repair a break in team functioning in order to redirect the team back on to the track of team effectiveness.

Benefits of Effective Work Teams

Hoevermeyer summarizes four benefits of developing self-managing work teams. First, an effective team eliminates the need for a manager to be involved in daily details as members take control of doing what needs to be done. Second, an effective team provides more timely and

appropriate customer service. Third, an effective team produces higher morale, productivity, and pride within team members than present in individuals who work alone. And finally, team members value working together and help break down barriers that limit growth within an organization (Hoevermeyer, 1993).

Conclusion

Shared understanding, facilitative functioning, decision making and goal setting are crucial pieces to the puzzle of team effectiveness. Upon completion of the subsequent chapters, the authors encourage the reader to return to the Team Effectiveness Diagram, Figure 1, to re-visualize the core components as a whole with each component being vitally important and all components being absolutely necessary for a team to obtain high levels of effectiveness.

Table 1 Some causes of team problems

Category of variables	Symptoms	Specific variable at root of problem
<i>Task characteristics</i>	The task is overly complex or poorly understood	Task complexity
	The organization of the task is sub-optimal	Task organization
<i>Work structure</i>	Work is assigned suboptimally or by the wrong people	Work assignment
	Team norms regarding work are inconsistent with organization culture	Team norms
<i>Individual characteristics</i>	Team members or team leader lacks necessary skills or abilities	Task KSA's; general abilities
	Team members do not clearly understand their own or other's role	Mental models
	Team members have poor motivation or attitudes	Motivation; attitude
<i>Team characteristics</i>	Skill/experience/attitude mix of team is sub-optimal	Member heterogeneity
	Team lacks cohesiveness	Cohesiveness
<i>Team processes</i>	Team handles conflicts poorly Team makes decisions or solves problems poorly	Conflict resolution Decision-making; problem-solving

Source: Tannenbaum, Salas, & Cannon-Bowers., 1996, p. 509.

Table 2 Interventions to promote team effectiveness

Intervention	Sample methods	Primary variables influenced by intervention	Resources/ references
<i>Team-member selection</i>	Competency-based selection interviews Assessment center exercises	All individual characteristics including traditional ones such as task KSAs, as well as team-related attitudes and skills Member heterogeneity Team norms	Schmitt et al. (1993)
<i>Team building</i>	Role/goal clarification Interpersonal approach/ conflict resolution Problem-solving approach	Attitudes Power distribution Climate - team Cohesiveness Team processes (in particular, communication, conflict resolution, and problem-solving)	Tannenbaum, Beard & Salas (1992)
<i>Team training</i>	Training shared mental models Team coordination training	Coordination Communication Decision-making Mental models	Swezey & Salas (1992)
<i>Leadership development</i>	Leadership training Coaching 360° feedback Briefing skills	Individual characteristics (of team leader) Individual characteristics of other team members Work assignment Team characteristics	Yukl & Van Fleet (1992); Bass (1990)
<i>Work redesign/ Restructuring</i>	Autonomous and semi-autonomous work groups Process re-engineering Restructuring	Task organization Work assignment Power distribution Team processes	Campion, Medsker & Higgs (1993); Hamner (1990)

Source: Tannenbaum, Salas, & Cannon-Bowers., 1996, p. 510

*** figures omitted -- see author for a copy.

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