

Team Theory & Practice

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NAME: *Eirik Monslaup Eikaas*

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STUDENTNº: *749244*

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“ *Never before has so much attention been paid to leadership, and the fundamental question we must ask is, what do we know and what should we know about leaders and leadership?* ”

— AVOLIO ET. AL(2009)

1 Introduction

In the contemporary world, it would be rare never to experience being part of a team; a group of people working, with some level of cohesion, towards the same goal, under the same fate, and with some level of task and work distribution(Wienclaw, 2010). Teams are everywhere; in school, in the private sector, in the public sector, services, health, government and so on(Salas et. al, 2015). Considering its widespread use, it should be of no surprise that there exist extensive research on the matter. But, as Salas et. al(2015) explains very well, "the research have provided vast knowledge, but it can be difficult to summarize into a useful set of principles."

1.1 Five Conditions

In its essence, teams serve under the premise of being able to generate a larger output, and of higher quality, than what its members, siloed, would have been capable of. For example by taking advantage of the (ideally) diversified set of skills to distribute tasks so that more can be done in synchrony and by the most competent and able member(Salas et. al 2015).

Although the goal and the premise in itself is noble, many teams constantly underperform due to a range of possible factors; conflicting personalities, unclear goals and tasks, lack of cohesion, of team and member autonomy, efficacy and to leadership(Emich et. al, 2015).

Wageman et. al(2009), which is the basis for Coutu(2009), proposed a set of five conditions that would need to be fulfilled in order to successfully create and maintain effective teams in the workplace. These conditions state that; (1)teams must be real, (2)teams need a compelling direction, (3)teams need enabling structures, (4)teams need a supportive organization and (5) teams need expert coaching. This essay will look at how these five conditions align with other research and findings and .

1.2 Teams Must Be Real

For a group of people to be a team, there need to exist a common purpose and goal which binds them together towards a shared future vision(Wageman et. al, 2009). For this to happen, the members of the team need to be aware of who is on the team. In researching the relationship between team goals and leader goals, Porter et. al(2015) found that a leader's goal orientation would be able to influence his team, so to say that a perceivably inauthentic goal orientation that would highlight inconsistencies would be have a negative impact on the team in terms of morale.

Porter et. al's(2015) findings further showed that just as a team must be real and the members share a future vision, this vision should also be shared by the leader. Hackman(2011) make clear that this would seem a very trivial and simple condition—and indeed it is, but that a surprisingly tall number of teams' members do not know who their teammates are.

1.3 Teams Need a Compelling Direction

Just as the team's members need to agree on the vision, the members individually need to see the vision and the path thereto viable. In Wageman et. al's(2009) original study, creating a compelling direction consist of three components; it needs to be *challenging*, *clear* and *consequential* in that it engages their full range of talents.

This condition relates to the members motivation, both for their work as well as for the viability of their shared future vision. The importance of this is simple; individual, intrinsic, motivation will inspire individual engagement which will inspire team motivation and team engagement, and repeat.

As Ryan & Deci(2000) discuss in regards to self-determination theory, extrinsic motivation will have greatly varying value in relation to its relative autonomy. When the motivation is extrinsic and low in autonomy, the value of the action will carry less weight, and in a worst case scenario, end up being solely Platonic. The argument here is that the direction not only needs to be compelling, but it needs to inspire for any extrinsic motivation to become intrinsic; the belief in the direction and in the future vision must come from within and be exerted outwards at others.

For any manager-led teams, leaders play a big part in ensuring that every member is correctly aligned to this direction, just as leaders often will be the reason there even is a team in the first place.

Putting Wageman et. al's(2009) conditions against Salas et. al's(2015) practical guide on

teamwork, these two first conditions outline what Salas et. al(2015) discuss as teamwork and taskwork as two separate and distinct measures, and the importance of both. Salas et. al(2015) argue that a focus on both are critical to successful team performance and that a team will fail if the members only have the knowledge of the task but cannot properly share with, coordinate or trust each other; ergo only satisfying one condition.

1.4 Teams Need Enabling Structures

In fostering practicable teamwork, Wageman et. al(2009) puts forth three structural features; *task design*, *team composition* and *core norms*. First, task design (also known as work design or job design), meaning how tasks are designed in order to best be fitting the context; personalities, industry, team function, etc. Hackman & Oldman's(1976) proposed a Job Characteristics Model (JCM), of which most of the current research stem from, proposed five core features; task variety, identity, significance, autonomy and feedback(Shantz et. al, 2013). In the words of Shantz et. al(2013); "the JCM posits that the psychological states of meaningfulness, experienced responsibility and knowledge of results mediate the relationship between these job design facets and organizational outcomes." The effects and empiricity of the JCM's five core features was, early on, tested through a number of studies and in a review of nearly 200 such studies, Fried & Ferris(1987) found that there exist support for designing jobs with more than one feature in mind but that numerous studies have failed to support the five feature model. Fried & Ferris(1987) also found that the relationship is stronger in terms of psychological outcomes than for behavioural outcomes. This research have led the JCM to become the dominant theory on task design, but as Behson(2010) argue, this model does not account for changes in corporate structure and culture and technological advances that has occurred since its first appearance nearly 40 years ago.

Another important aspect to the binding in a team is the composition of the members itself. An extensive amount of research has been done on team composition, and especially in terms of personalities and models such as Belbin's(1986) nine team roles for what to look for and how to categorise members, with the purpose of making a complementary fit between roles, competencies and personalities. Henry & Stevens(1997) found a positive relationship between a Belbin role composed team and team effectiveness. The MBTI(Myer-Briggs Type Indicator) is a popular tool for assessing people's personality, but has fallen under scrutiny as the preferences have been indicated to not be mutually exclusive and the scales to be inaccurate(Schweiger, 1985). The Big Five Personality Traits on the other hand is a more reliable option as it is built on a common stock of culturally universal personality traits(Raad, 2015).

When composing a team, a focus on these models might be of benefit, as it will help ensuring that the team's members are complementary to each other. But their inherent personality is

not the only factor that should be taken into account in ensuring complementarity. A focus on diversity issues such as gender, age, culture and so on can further help to avoid a group-think scenario where the team polarize each others opinions, diminishing the level of fresh input(Higgs et. al, 2005). Harrison et. al(2002) found that the effect of demographic diversity in any team will diminish over time as members assimilate, which is a good argument for interchanging members over time, but nonetheless, an initial focus on diversity will help avoid an initial group-think(Harrison et. al2002; Salas et. al, 2015). Although the effect of demographic diversity weakened over time, Harrison et. al(2002) also found that deep-level, psychological diversity strengthened over time.

Lastly, the core norms of the team; the playing rules of interaction and behaviour regard how the team expect each other to behave internally, externally, vertically and laterally. Norms of conduct organise and promote specific team behaviour with the purpose of improving cohesion, predictability, performance, trust and accountability(Hackman, 2011). As is the premise for Wageman et. al's(2009) conditions, the enabling structures lead the way for improved team performance, and supporting evidence for this condition can be found in Higgs et. al(2005), Harrison et. al(2002) and LePine et. al(2008), while on the other hand, Batenburg(2013) found no relationship between Belbin roles and team performance.

1.5 Teams Need a Supportive Organization

Through the example of what it takes for a flight crew to ably and successfully carry out a flight, Hackman(2011) puts forth four aspects of support that have consequential effects on team behaviour and performance; (1)access to the information needed to accomplish the work, (2)availability of educational resources to supplement members' knowledge and skill, (3) ample material resources for use in carrying out the team's work, (4) external recognition and reinforcement of excellent team performance.

Hackman(2011) is catered most to a specific focus on intelligence teams, but in a general sense, access to all necessary information is vital for a team to successfully carry out a task efficiently. Once information is available, educational resources enables members to fill in the holes of their knowledge and skills and material resources provide the tools needed to complete the task.

A study done by Bentley et. al(2015) linking organisational support and teleworker well being found a positive relationship between organisational support provided and teleworker well being. Although there are a lot of differences between teleworkers and team settings, the study support the idea of organizational support having an impact on performance.

The focus on the importance of external recognition and reinforcement is supported by Hinkin & Shriesheim(2015) that, in looking at reinforcement from a leadership perspective found that external recognition can be linked to subordinate trust and would therefore signify to its mutually positive importance.

1.6 Teams Need Expert Coaching

Just as any managed entity is influenced by its manager or lack thereof, a team will, as we have seen, be influenced by its leadership, and the modus operandi of leadership will have an effect on its performance. For a team to function as a team; to be real and to execute their assigned task and function, a team needs autonomy. From a leadership perspective, this entails to best foster performance, and to lead rather than manage; to coach.

Baur et. al(2015), Boies et. al(2015), Hinkin & Schriesheim(2015), Rapp et. al(2016) and Boss(2000) all show that external leaders of teams providing support showed a positive effect on the team's performance. Boies et. al(2015) stated that "a team led by someone providing intellectual stimulation and inspiration showed more trust and a negative relation to errors made by the team," while Baur et. al(2015) and Gebert et. al(2016) showed a positive relationship between leader charismatic rhetoric and team performance.

Boss's(2000) research on leader absence in team building for example indicated (as it was not under a controlled experiment) that the effect of the team building effort for TMT's (Top Management Team) correlated with their CEO being present or not suggesting to the CEO's importance for teams as a coach. Ling et. al(2015) also studied CEOs and TMTs and found a positive relationship between CEO empowerment and TMT-CEO demographical similarities, suggesting that coaching will have larger performance impacts if the members are demographically similar to the coach. Hackman(2011) also argue that teams require different types of coaching interventions as they go through their life-cycle; motivational as the team is forming and storming, consultative as the cycle reaches its midpoint and educational as it approaches the end.

1.7 Making The Point for Communication

In order for the team to function together, for the alignment of direction to have value, for the structures taken into use and the organization to have a function, the team need to communicate. Underlying in Wageman et. al(2009) is the notion that the actual interaction will come natural when these conditions are fulfilled. Teams exist in occupational contexts way beyond the pragmatic business world and the public sector. They exist heavily in sports, in creative industries, in education, in informal and casual settings, and so on, and these

contextual differences in culture, in purpose, length, competence and supervision all would have their impact on the implicit level of communication.

Although a team might be complementary on paper does not mean that they immediately or in every organisational or occupational context will interact in the intended way and I see this as a weakness with Wageman et. al's(2009) conditions. Salas et. al(2015) considers communication one of the nine core considerations in effective teams in their model and show arguments that good and effective communication is negatively related to errors, as well as influencing coordination and conflicts.

1.8 Final Notes

When it comes to team performance, there has been done a good amount of research, but the important findings of the research is not readily reflected in the practice(Hollenbeck, 2004). Wageman et. al's(2009) conditions, that are further expanded in Hackman(2011), provide a strategic starting point for delving further into team leadership literature and practice. One of the ways in which this field of research and theory is interesting is in its absolute shear mass and that all of the conditions laid out must find its balance in occupational function of teams, organisational focus, culture and so on. As teams that directly branch out from the organisation's main prong derive the basis for their sub-culture and norms from the organisation's culture, overarching circumstances will heavily impact the culture of the teams. In this sense, fulfilling the five conditions does not guarantee performance, but it is a helpful and fairly justified tool in terms of creating teams.

2 References

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