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Common Factors of High Performance Teams

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Abstract

Utilization of work teams is now wide spread in all types of organizations throughout the world. However, an understanding of the important factors common to high performance teams is rare. The purpose of this content analysis is to explore the literature and propose findings related to high performance teams. These include definition and types, goals, talent, skills, performance ethics, incentives and motivation, efficacy, leadership, conflict, communication, power and empowerment, norms and standards, and values.

Common Factors of High Performance Teams

Organizations continue to utilize team structures because of increasing competition and technological changes (Chen & Klimoski, 2003). Given this movement towards more team-based organizational development, both researchers and practitioners have been eager to develop methods to enhance team performance within a variety of team settings and at lightening speed (Brown, 2003). According to Larson and LaFasto (1989):

For several decades now social scientists have been urging us to confront a sad paradox in our collective evolution...On the one hand, we possess the technical competence, physical resources, and intellectual capacity to satisfy all the basic needs of mankind...On the other hand, we seem to lack the essential ability to work together effectively to solve critical problems. (p. 13)

Even with these concerns, organizations of all kinds (e.g., corporate, non-profit, government) are designing and implementing work teams for the purpose of making the decisions and plans that managers had once been tasked. In fact, Cohen and Bailey (1997) found that organizations with more than 100 employees utilized team structures nearly 82 percent of the time and that team structures have produced significant results for the organizations that have utilized them (Daniels, 1998; Hoerr & Pollack, 1986; Kirkman & Rosen, 2000; Shulman, 1996).

According to Katzenbach and Smith (1993) there are four reasons that teams work: 1) individuals coming together bring complimentary skills and experience that exceed any individual; 2) teams support real-time problem solving and are more flexible and responsive to changing demands with greater speed, accuracy, and awareness than individuals; 3) teams provide a unique social dimension that enhances the economic and administrative aspects of work; and 4) teams have more fun (p. 18). Shulman (1996) and Katzenbach and Smith (1993)

hypothesized that individuals, as compared to teams, are no longer able to deal with the complexities and pressures that are best solved using team structures that require multiple skills, judgments, and experiences.

Interestingly, although teams have been studied for the past few decades, a consensus has not been reached on the specific high performance practices that make up effective teams for organizations in general (Gephard, 1995). The literature, however, has provided some clues. For example, according to a DDI (Development Dimensions International) study, of the 39 practices studied, team-building skills and self-managed worked teams appeared as the most valuable competency (Daniels, 1998). In another DDI study, high performing organizations continue to rate effective teamwork as one of the top 10 competencies needed to compete in the global market place (Bernthall, Dalesio, & Wellings, 1997). Generally speaking, Guzzo and Dickson (1996) stated, “Ample evidence indicates that team-based forms or organizing often brings about higher levels of organizational effectiveness in comparison with traditional, bureaucratic forms” (p. 330). In addition, Jehn and Mannix (2001) purported that teams help increase organizational efficiency, flexibility, and performance.

With so many organizations utilizing work groups and teams, it is important to investigate the factors or components of high performing teams. However, it is important to note that because most teams are unique in their goals and focus, there is no “off the shelf” solution for all teams (Davenport, 2001) and that “there is no singular, uniform measure of performance effectiveness for groups” (Guzzo and Dickson, 1996. p. 309). Shulman (1996) explained that while there seems to be a shared understanding of what makes an effective work group, the “results across studies are inconsistent,” primarily because the field is “badly fragmented” (p. 358). Further, Rainey (1991) found that “so many kinds of groups operate under so many

different conditions that researchers strain to understand all the variations” (p. 185). Even with these challenges, an exploration of these high performance factors can be beneficial.

Purpose and Design

The purpose of this literature review was to explore the literature related to high performing teams and formulate implications to human resource development (HRD) theory and practice. The following questions were investigated: 1) What are theoretical frameworks used to understand high performing teams? 2) What are some of the characteristics, features, or attributes of effectively functioning teams? and 3) What findings can assist practitioners in assessing, designing, developing, implementing, and/or evaluating team-related interventions? While no team is identical, the constructs addressed in this paper represent many of the core components that seem to permeate most, if not all, of the team literature reviewed. This review is a content analysis of scholarly literature located in various business (e.g., ABI, General BusinessFile ASAP) and psychology databases (i.e., PsycINFO, Expanded Academic Index). The key words used for the search included: team, team-building, teamwork, high performance teams, and work groups. Among the numerous articles and books located and reviewed, the ones most applicable to the topic were subjectively chosen for this review.

Findings and Discussion

Theoretical Frameworks

According to Bell (1982), a lack of methodological consistency, in addition to the diversity of groups studied, has made it difficult to generalize the phases of team development; however, in studying the stages of development, while three-stage and other types of models have been proposed (Bell, 1982), Tuckman’s (1965) model has become most prevalent in the current literature. In this seminal work, Tuckman describes a four-stage model that includes

forming, storming, norming, and performing. Since Tuckman's original work, numerous scholars and practitioners have used and modified his model and/or re-defined stage definitions. Carter (2001) reviewed Cufaude's simplification of this team development process. Through this refinement of the Tuckman model, Cufaude re-defined these four stages in a useful framework.

1. *Forming*: Individuals are trying to get to know each other and the organization. A commitment to the team effort has not yet been formed. Leaders provide direction and outline expectations.
2. *Storming*: In this rocky stage, team members may challenge the leader and each other. The leader coaches members on how to manage conflict and focus on goals.
3. *Norming*: After individuals have worked through conflicts, things start to gel. People appreciate their differences and work together. The leader now serves as a facilitator, offering encouragement and guidance.
4. *Performing*: The team is fully functional, able to manage their relationships, and work toward shared goals. Team members feel accepted and communicate openly with the leader. The leader focuses on delegating responsibilities and identifying when the team is moving into a different stage.

On the other hand, Katzenbach and Smith (1993) described a five-stage movement to becoming a high performance team. Stage one is defined as simply the "working group." While the "working group" does achieve a certain level of results, their performance is well below high performance. In a brief review of these stages, Katzenbach and Smith (1993) described the "working group" as individuals who come together primarily to share information, best practices, and perspectives without a real set of group objectives. A second phase, known as the "pseudo team," actually reaches an even lower level performance before becoming a "potential team." A

“pseudo-team” is where a team may have a significant performance need but is not really trying to achieve it; and where there is no common purpose. This type of team is exemplified as simply the sum of its whole is less than the individual parts. A “potential team” is a team that is focused on an incremental performance need and there is a bias for reaching high performance. While there is not yet group accountability or a working approach, these teams are potential candidates for reaching the high performance stage. The potential team is followed by a “real team” and finally by a “high-performance team” (p. 84). A “real team” is a group of individuals who are equally committed to a common purpose for which they hold each other accountable (Regan, 1999); yet, a “high performance team” is one that satisfies all of the requirements of real teams, but take their commitment further, deepening their relationships for which individuals sacrifice deeply for the overall success of each individual on the team as well as the team itself (pp. 91-92). It is the move to this last stage where individuals must “take risks involving conflict, trust, interdependence, and hard work” (p. 109).

While these stage models provide a simple outline for the evolution of teams, investigators think differently about team stages of development. In a further review of the temporal aspects of team or project development, Shulman (1996) concluded that an important implication of the many longitudinal studies indicates that the assumed linear and fixed sequence of group process may have added very little to our understanding of how work groups go about achieving their objectives (p. 360). On the other hand, Rainey (1991) stated that while group norms and values do develop, if not through vague and elusive processes, that “patterns of conformity to certain behaviors and beliefs” (p. 188) do seem to take place. Like other stage-based opinions, cases can be made on either side about the existence or vagueness of stage development. At the general level, however, it seems useful to review these stages as they offer

some insights into the nature of group development and seem to be useful overall for practitioners who seek to understand the nature of group dynamics over time.

Characteristics, Features, or Attributes of Effectively Functioning Teams

An investigation of all the characteristics, features, or attributes of effectively functioning teams is not possible in this length of paper. Hence, we have focused on presenting our findings related to the following: definition, purpose and goals, talent, skills, performance ethics, incentives and motivation, efficacy, leadership, conflict, communication, power and empowerment, and norms and standards.

Team definition, purpose, and goals. While there are subtle differences in defining what a team is—some differentiating between work groups and teams (i.e., Katzenbach & Smith, 1993) while others use these words interchangeably (Guzzo & Dickson, 1996)—most definitions resemble each other to some degree. Guzzo & Dickson (1996) defined a workgroup as a group “made up of individuals who see themselves and who are seen by others as a social entity, who are interdependent because of the tasks they perform as members of a group, who are embedded in one or more larger social systems, and who perform tasks that affect others (pp. 208-209). Any number of theorists looking to define teamwork will assert the importance of having a synergistic social entity that works towards a common goal or goals, often with high performance teams exemplifying a total commitment to the work as well as a total commitment to each other (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993).

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) stated, “Common sense suggests that teams cannot succeed without a shared purpose” (p. 2). While this may be an obvious statement, teams often form (or are developed) without a clear direction or meaning even though many researchers (e.g., Weiss, 2002) have explained that employees are inclined to do better when they know how to do their

jobs and why they are doing them. Teams that seek higher levels of performance should ensure that each member understands and supports the true meaning and value of the team's mission and vision. Clarifying the purpose in this manner, tied to each individual's roles and responsibilities, is a major contributor for tapping into team potential.

No teams arise without performance challenges (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993) and clear, elevating goals (Larson & LaFasto, 1989). As such, it is essential for any performance team to have compelling short and long-term goals that excite and challenge the individuals as well as the team. According to Knight, Durham, & Locke (2001) in a computer simulation study, teams with difficult goals achieved the highest level of performance while taking more strategic risk in order to obtain their goals. Team performance was also positively affected by goal difficulty, team efficacy (positively influenced by teams' goals for both the individuals and the team), strategic risk, and tactical implementation (Knight & Durham, 2001). In building high performance teams, Regan (1999) explained that teams should be given the impossible goal because such a goal, greater than any one person can handle, ushers in the need for team resources and builds a compelling challenge. Also, such challenges facilitate inter-dependent behavior, which, according to Gully, Incalcaterra, Hoshi & Beaublen (2002), increases the collective efficacy of the team. While the word *impossible* is rarely used in the literature, the idea of stretch goals are often used to raise the bar and increase the challenge necessary to motivate groups or teams towards their given purpose (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993).

Talent, skills, and ethics. High performance teams must begin by recruiting and maintaining their best talent, while helping non-value-added members relocate their talents to more appropriate venues. By recruiting, maintaining, and cultivating high talent, morale increases as performance increases (Larson & LaFasto, 1989). This is consistent with the work of

Buckingham and Coffman (1999) who asserted that internal resources, rather than being spent on lower performing individuals, should be spent on the high performance to help them achieve more. Thus, while selection and training is critical for cultivating contributing team members, teams must constantly monitor their talent pool to insure that each person's talents and gifts meet the needs of the team. Larson and LaFasto (1989) described two additional features that must accompany talent. These include a strong desire to contribute and the capability of collaborating effectively. Thus, "when strong technical skills are combined with a desire to contribute and an ability to be collaborative, the observable outcome is an elevated sense of confidence among team members" (p. 71).

In building high performance teams, after selecting for talent (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993), a proper complement of skills are in order. These skills must meet the challenges afforded to each team (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). It must be emphasized that technical skill building will not insure a high performance team. Instead, individuals must have the proper balance of technical skills, problem-solving and decision-making skills, and interpersonal skills in order to work with one another most effectively. This later category, interpersonal skills, include risk taking, helpful criticism, objectivity, active listening, giving the benefit of the doubt, support, and recognizing the interests and achievements of others.

While building teams, an overall commitment needs to be made around performance ethic (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). This ethic builds into the organization (and teams) the overarching philosophy of high performance results. Instead of looking towards the next organizational fad, building an expectation of performance that permeates the organization through organizational leaders and the individual workers is essential in today's business environment. This ethic and expectation must then be supported by organizational leaders and

followers (Chen, Klimoski, 2003) who, while exercising candor and mutual respect, hold themselves and their organizations relentlessly accountable at both the individual and team level (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993).

Incentives, motivation, and efficacy. While teams are organized around a purpose, they must provide an opportunity for individual members to be rewarded for their efforts. These rewards come in the form both monetary and non-monetary systems that encourage exemplary behaviors that lead to high performance. In their study, Knight, Durham, and Lock (2001) found that incentives had a positive impact on tactical implementation and this, in turn, positively affected performance. In looking at incentives, it is important to look at intrinsic as well as extrinsic motivators, and in some settings, the degree to which team leaders have control over the dispensing of incentives (Koppenhaver and Shrader, 2003).

There are many historic and theoretical models of motivation that can be used to better understand employee, even team performance. However, incentives that re-enforce behaviors are often used to facilitate team motivation (Steers, Mowday & Shapiro, 2004). Weiss (2002) and others have shown that rewards come in many forms, a powerful form of which includes public or private recognition. When looking at raising the level of team performance, managers and leaders would benefit from looking beyond remunerative strategies to taking a closer look at the intangible benefits and intrinsic motives. The research indicates that, over the long-term, intrinsic motivation taps into deeper levels of energy and commitment than external sources of motivation (Deci, 1972). In his seminal work on “flow,” Csikszentmihalyi (1990) described “autotelic” experiences as those participated in for their own sake. These kinds of activities are seen to be so enjoyable in and of themselves that individuals will participate in them because of the value they provide intrinsically. As such, exponential levels of performance can take place when employees

begin to find personal satisfaction in their work, or when the work itself is motivating (Weiss, 2002). According to Katzenbach and Smith (1993), when small groups of people challenge themselves in something that begins to interest them, “their respective titles, perks, and other ‘stripes’ fade into the background” (p. 54). Hence, while external motivators are still effective and necessary to improve individual and team performance, finding ways to motivate team members intrinsically may have potentially greater positive results.

More than any one thing, believing in one’s self, organization, and team is critical for reaching high performance levels (Brown, 2003). Katzenbach and Smith (1993) stated that leaders of high performing teams “simply need to believe in their purpose and their people” (p. 138). In addition, an individual team member must also believe in his or her ability to do a job well. A sense of self-efficacy combined with small victories and positive feedback assists in the development of team efficacy. Knight, Durham, and Locke (2001) found efficacy was strongly connected to performance. In essence, individuals and teams with higher degrees of efficacy appear to believe in their skills more and thus are more apt to take larger strategic risks in order to achieve their goals (Brown, 2003). However, they offer an important caution; individuals with too much efficacy can develop an overconfidence that can lead to unnecessary mistakes.

Leadership. High performing leaders usually accompany high performance teams. High performing teams have leaders who, when times are certain and peaceful, are able to take a proactive stance and help the team stay ahead. In fact, Reagan (1991) encouraged team leaders to create a sense of distress and urgency so as not to be confronted by external crises. Reagan purported that essential leadership qualities include the following: 1) having a vision—meaning one should see the crisis before it happens and act upon it; 2) convincing the opinion leaders of the importance of the goals at hand; 3) organizing quantitative goals; 4) being persistent in

asking for the goals to be met; 5) endurance testing—whereby leaders must remain steadfast amongst team members trying to test the leaders commitment; 6) the ability to induce creativity once goals are set; and 7) staying out of the team’s way. Larson and LaFasto (1989) found that effective team leaders establish a vision for the future, create change, and unleash the energy of contributing members. Additionally, they found that effective leaders were driven by guiding principles, where, in essence, “the leaders managed the principles, and the principles managed the team (p. 124). Katzenbach and Smith (1993) cited six elements necessary for good team leadership. First, team leaders must keep the purpose, goals, and approach relevant and meaningful. Second, leaders should continue to build commitment and confidence. Third, team leaders insure that their members are always enhancing their skills—skills that include technical, problem solving, decision-making, interpersonal, and teamwork skills. Fourth, effective team leaders are skillful at managing relationships from the outside, with a focus on removing obstacles that get in the way of team performance. Fifth, they provide opportunities for others and are the last to seek credit. And sixth, team leaders don’t shy away from getting in the trenches and doing the real work. While the authors contend that most individuals can develop effective skills to be a team leader, they suggest these components as a guideline for success.

In yet another concise summary of leadership qualities, De Vries (1999) provided a concise summary of qualities important to team leadership:

Effective team leaders avoid secrecy of any kind at all costs. They treat members of the team with respect, listen to feedback and ask questions, address problems, and display tolerance and flexibility. They offer guidance and structure, facilitating task accomplishment, and they provide a focus for action. They encourage dialogue and interaction among the participants, balancing appropriate levels of participation to ensure

that all points of view are explored (and withholding the possible swaying of opinion). They capitalize on the differences among group members when those differences can further the common good of the group. They give praise and recognition for individual and group efforts, and they celebrate success. They accept ownership for the decisions of the team and keep their focus sharp through follow-up. By acting in these ways, they create an atmosphere of growth and learning. In the process, they encourage group members to evaluate their own progress and development. (pp. 74-75)

While differences in leadership qualities and practices are discussed in all of the cited summaries, it appears that there is some agreement regarding the finding that effective team leaders essentially focus on purpose, goals, relationships, and an unwavering commitment to the results that benefit the organization as well as each individual. These qualities and focus are similar in the study of transformational leaders who have the ability to influence team performance through these and other key factors including building empowered team environments and facilitating functional team conflict (Dionne, Yammarino, Atwater, and Spangler, 2004). All said, building effective teams is a balancing act—a balance between rules and creativity, one's own needs and the needs of the group, and between direction from the top and decision-making at the front-lines.

Conflict and communication. Conflict is an essential part of becoming a high performance team (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). There are many relational contexts for conflict including the following: individual (i.e., role conflict), between people, within and between groups, organizational departments, and such. Other aspects of conflict are equally diverse and include culture, values, goals, structures, tasks and functions, process, authority and leadership

processes, environmental pressures, demographics, and individual personalities (Jehn & Chatman, 2000; Rainey, 1991, p. 196).

In looking at stages of conflict, Rainey (1991) mentions several phases: 1) *latent conflict* where the conditions for conflict are set; 2) *perceived conflict* where people begin to sense it; 3) *felt conflict* where people begin to feel its presence; 4) *manifest conflict* which includes out and out warfare; and 5) *conflict aftermath* where some solutions and alternatives begin to play out. When looking at these stages of conflict, Rainey discussed several ways people respond. These include avoidance, ignoring or withdrawing; accommodation, where cooperation and concessions are made; compromise, involving an equal exchange of concessions; competing, trying to outdo the other party; and collaboration, trying to meet the needs of each side. While conflict can be very damaging to a group's performance and must be carefully balanced, "research shows that well managed conflict, especially task conflict (Jehn & Chatman 2000) often improves decision making in organizations (Rainey, 1991, p. 195).

In a study specifically researching the process of conflict, Jehn and Mannix (2001) found certain conflict patterns with high performing teams to be most prevalent. In a longitudinal study, teams that performed best experienced certain patterns of conflict. These patterns included low but increasing levels of task conflict (Jehn & Chatman, 2000) as a project progressed; low but rising levels of relationship conflict as teams got close to deadlines; and increased levels of task conflict at the midpoint of projects. According to Jehn and Mannix (2001), the members with an ideal conflict profile had pre-established value systems, high levels of trust and respect, and open discussion norms around conflict during the middle stages of their interaction, thus ushering in new perspectives and paradigms which served the overall goals of the team. Additionally, conflict in general was lower for high performing groups and higher for low performing groups,

thus supporting the idea that generalized process, task, and relationship conflict possibly came from the crisis the low performing teams were in at the deadline of a project.

While high performing teams experience certain types of healthy conflict, and while they are said to be good communicators, the research indicated that different types of communication, even different levels of perceptions of the amount of conflict (Jehn & Chatman, 2000) can have different types of effects. Rainey (1991) explained that varying types of communication strategies have been studied (e.g., circle patterns, chain patterns, wheel patterns). Different communication strategies appear to yield different results (including satisfaction) amongst those who participated, suggesting that the best forms of communication are dependent upon the work group and their goals and objectives. Open communication in high performing teams means a focus on coaching instead of directing (Regan, 1991). The value of coaching has emerged over the past several years as a process for helping individuals think for themselves. Coaching is seen as a facilitative process where team leaders or members help facilitate the process of self and group discovery. By utilizing coaching more frequently, individuals become less dependent and more able to take greater levels of responsibility.

Communication problems or distortions are also important to understand. Gordon (1990) depicted four types of miscommunication in general: 1) lack of feedback; 2) noise in communication such that the original message is distorted; 3) misuse of language such that words are used, which inflame, distort, or otherwise makes vague the information being communicated; and 4) listening deficiencies. For public bureaus, Gortner, Mahler, and Nicholson (1987) added others: distorted perceptions—often caused by pre-conceived ideas or from striving to save self-esteem; erroneous translations; errors of abstraction and differentiation—again where individuals misinterpret the information or when information is selectively understood or

distorted; lack of congruence or an inconsistency between different parts of the message; a distrusted source; jargon, which promotes communication difficulties because of highly, specialized language; and manipulating and withholding important information (adapted from Rainey, 1991, p. 194). While there are any number of communication problems and solutions, a key to team performance is maintaining open lines of communication, even Verbal Self-Guidance (VSG) strategies to enhance team efficacy and performance (Brown, 2003). As summarized by Weiss (2002), “When you keep channels of communication open, you provide motivation, maintain interest and promote cooperation” (p. 4).

Power & empowerment. The issue of power is highly dependent upon the type of high performance team in question. While most organizations now support egalitarian practices and shared decision-making that leads to greater buy-in, satisfaction, and ultimately performance, there remain organizations that have depended upon complete hierarchical control (i.e., traditional military teams). While many support the hierarchical integrity of military command structures, there may still be room to empower, even those in uniform. It was once said by General George S. Patton “Never tell your soldiers how to do a job. Tell them the results you want, and they will surprise you with their ingenuity” (Regan, 1999). In corporate or many other settings, however, empowered work teams are seen as a key to high performance. Empowering teams have proved useful for many organizations as they increase ownership, provide an opportunity for developing new skills, increase the overall interest in projects, and otherwise facilitate decision-making where the work is being done. In a review of his model for generating sustained workforce performance, Pfeffer (1998) supported several practices, among them the implementation of self-managed teams and the decentralization or decision making, such that a larger part of the organization can accept more accountability and a greater appreciation for how

one's work affects the work of others. To integrate the possible continuum above, Peters and Waterman (1982) discussed the principle of parallel "loose-tight" properties, such that specific boundaries are constructed with enough room in between the boundaries for individuals to make empowered choices.

In looking at what constitutes a highly empowered work team, Kirkman and Rosen (2000) described four key elements: 1) a sense of potency which translates into a sense of team efficacy, the derivative of which are closely knit relationships and supportive behaviors; 2) a sense of meaningfulness that connects the individuals to the mission of the group (this includes an intrinsic caring about the tasks—"Teams high on the meaningfulness dimension of empowerment, individually and collectively, experience ordinary tasks in a extra-ordinary way" (p. 50); 3) highly empowered teams experience a sense of autonomy, discretion, and control; and 4) empowered teams gain a sense of the impact of their mission (seeing the end results of their work). Feedback from both internal and external clients provides the data necessary to judge impact (for a comprehensive list of team empowerment levers see Kirkman and Rosen, 2000, p. 56). When looking at leader behaviors that are associated with high levels of team empowerment, Kirkham & Rosen (2000) mentioned generating high team expectations, setting an environment where team members set their own goals and control their work, staying out of the way of team members problems, displaying trust in the abilities of the team members, and holding teams responsible for their actions.

Norms and Standards. Like rules that govern group behavior, norms can be helpful in assisting team development and performance. For example, Jehn and Mannix (2001) proposed that high performance teams build "open discussion" norms in order to promote task conflict—a type of conflict associated with high performance teams. Other norms of high performance teams

include high levels of respect among members and a cohesive and supportive team environment. Any number of norms may exist for a given team, but high performing teams use norms in general to help govern behavior. In addition to having team norms, teams also benefit from organizing their team standards. As asserted by Larson and LaFasto (1989), “openly articulated or haphazardly applied, standards define those relevant and very intricate expectations that eventually determine the level of performance a team deems acceptable” (p. 95). Standards change the nature of performance by setting the bar at a new level—a level that is clearly defined. Such was the case when Roger Bannister broke the 4:00 minute mile—a seemingly impossible goal at the time—only to be met and exceeded by several other runners within just a few months.

Clear performance standards are essential to high performing teams. Such standards provides a system of accountability which also feeds into the performance ethic (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993), an ethic that support results for customers, employees, and shareholders, recognizing that each are of critical importance and must be balanced with great care and consideration. Driving standards are certain pressures. These pressures include the individual’s performance expectations, team pressure to perform, team leader pressure, the consequences of success or failure, and other external pressures (e.g., the larger organization, the crowd) that compel one to excel (Larson & LaFasto, 1989). According to Larson and LaFasto (1989), “people with high standards are those people who do ordinary things in an extraordinary way” (p. 100). When helping people reach the extraordinary, it is important to remember that setting standards must be a flexible process. Larson and LaFasto also provided three common features of developing standards of excellence: 1) setting standards that include a variety of variables, variables that include individual commitment, motivation, self-esteem, and performance; 2)

mutual accountability; and 3) a dedication to reviewing and reworking standards to keep them fresh and valuable for the team.

Recommendations

The results of this analysis suggest recommendations for practitioners. Many organizational leaders do not put resources toward efforts (often training and education related) to develop high performance teams. Many assign individuals to participate in teams and expect high performance. This, of course, is a wishful course of action. The literature supports the premise that well-functioning teams can out perform individuals or other groups. Leaders, managers, and HRD professionals need to be educated about the relationship between productivity/performance (the bottom line) and high performing team efforts (including the workplace, psychological, and behavioral correlates that influence them). Overall, interventions based around these relationships should be considered. We also recommend that members of current teams (management or non-management) review this and other articles summarizing high performance factors so that they can understand team dynamics and how they can help improve performance.

Organizational leaders who put forth resources (e.g., time, educational opportunities, and money), team-building/teamwork training and development described will see the benefits, particularly if connections are made between team performance and performance/productivity increases. As always, initiatives that have direct or indirect effects on the productivity of our human resources (employees) can also assist in promoting organizational competitiveness in the market place.

Conclusions and Implications

Understanding the various components of high performing teams (definition, purpose, and goals; talent, skills, and ethics; incentives, motivation, and efficacy; leadership; conflict and communication; power and empowerment; and norms and standards) can be helpful in creating and developing these types of teams in organizations today. Teams have been found to offer not only increased organizational performance, but also an increase in team member satisfaction (Hoerr & Pollock, 1986), helping members to become more valuable in the process (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). Groups have an advantage over individuals because of the availability of new ideas, talent, and viewpoints. Group decision making also promotes more understanding, acceptance, and a clearer perspective of why something is taking place (Rainey, 1991). Effective teams learn to think for themselves (Regan, 1999) and, therefore, move decision-making to the front lines where it is often needed. While taking more time at first, its value improves efficiency over time. It is through this process of collective excellence that individuals become more than the “sum of their parts” and learn to work together towards goals and objectives that provide tremendous meaning, not only for the organizations who house them, but for the individuals that sacrifice for them. Taken collectively, Brown (2003) comments that advancing team performance means systematically developing and assessing new training methods to support such changes in team effectiveness.

This study offers contributions to the human resource development literature. First, HRD and organization development interventions often focus on team-building relationships and nearly always center on group and team work during the design and development phases. Literature assisting practitioners in acquiring a deeper understanding of high performance teams can assist them in team work of any type. Second, it supports the premise that developing and facilitating high performing teams is a complex phenomenon and influential factors need to

continue to be explored for progress in both research and practice. Finally, practitioners can utilize this information to assist them in assessing and evaluating new and existing programs or initiatives focused on teams.

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