

UNDERSTANDING WORK TEAMS

SEMESTER-6
UNIT-1

DEFINITIONS

People often use the word groups and teams interchangeably. It is commonly thought that groups and teams are the same and that they are only spelled differently. However, the truth is that groups and teams are not the same.

Robbins and Judge (2013) describe a work group as “a group that interacts primarily to share information and to make decisions to help each group member perform his or her responsibility”.

Robbins and Judge (2013) describe a work team as “a group whose individual efforts results in a performance that is greater than the sum of individual inputs”.

The important differences between a work group and work team are:

- (1) Synergy and performance : In a work group there is no positive synergy. It is at best neutral but it can sometimes be negative. Work groups do not engage in collective work that require joint efforts. The performance of the work group is merely the sum of individual group member's contribution.

A work team is a coordinated effort. A work team generates a lot of positive synergy. The efforts of the individual members results in a performance that is greater than the sum of the individual inputs.

(2) Goal: The basic goal of a work group is to share information. The primary goal of a work team is collective performance.

(3) Accountability: In a work group, individual members are responsible or accountable only for their performance. Members do not consider themselves responsible for any results other than their own. Although members pool their resources together to attain the goal, it is individual performance that is taken into account while giving rewards.

In a work team, accountability is an individual as well as mutual. The team works together to produce an outcome and each team member responsible for that outcome. Rewards are shared in a team.

(4) Skills: in a work group, members possess random and varied skills. In a work team, skills are of the members are complementary.

Through extensive use of teams, organization create the potential to produce outputs without any increase in the inputs. However, it is important to remember that merely calling a group as team does not automatically make it so. There will be an improvement in performance only when the team meets the above mentioned requirements.

THE HARE AND THE TORTOISE- THE NEW STORY

We have all heard the story of the hare and the tortoise and the famous race they had. The moral of the story is **slow and steady wins the race**.

The story does not end there. Some interesting sequels to the story have been developed. The sequels run as follows:

The hare was disappointed at losing the race and he did some soul searching. He realized that he lost the race only because he had been overconfident, careless and negligent. If he had not taken things for granted, there is no way the tortoise could have beaten him. So he challenged the tortoise to another race. The tortoise agreed. This time, the hare went all out and ran without stopping from the start to finish. He won by several miles.

The moral of the story- **fast and consistent will always beat slow and steady**. It's good to be slow and steady, but it's better to be fast and reliable.

The story doesn't end here. The tortoise did some thinking and realised that there was no way he could beat the hare in its current format. He thought for a while, and then challenged the hare to another race, but on a slightly different route. The hare agreed. They started off. In keeping with his self-made commitment to be consistently fast, the hare took off and ran at top speed - until he came to a broad river. The hare sat there wondering what to do. In the meantime the tortoise trundled along, got into the river, swam to the opposite bank, continued walking and finished the race.

The moral of the story - **first identify your core competency and then change the playing field to suit your core competency.** Working to your strengths will not only get you noticed but will also create opportunities for growth and advancements.

The story still hasn't ended. The hare and the tortoise by this time had become pretty good friends and they did some thinking together.

Both realised that the last race could have been run much better. So they decided to do the last race again, but to run as a team this time. They started off this time and hare carried the tortoise till the river bank. There, the tortoise took over and swam across the hare on his back. On the opposite Bank, the hare again carried the tortoise and they reached the finish line together they both felt a greater sense of satisfaction than they had felt earlier.

The moral of the story - is to be good individually brilliant and to have strong core competencies; but unless you are able to work in a team and harness each other's core competencies; you will always perform below per because there will always be situation at which you will do poorly when someone else does well. Teamwork is mainly about situational leadership, letting the person with the relevant care competency for a situation take leadership.

The importance lessons to be learnt from these from these stories are:

- (1) Fast and consistent will always beat slow and steady.
- (2) Work to your competencies.
- (3) Pooling resources and working as a team will always beat individual performers.
- (4) Never give up when forced with failure
- (5) Compete against the situation not against a rival.

TYPES OF TEAMS

There are many different kinds of teams. The four types of teams that are most commonly seen in organizations are:

- (1) Problems- solving teams:** Problem solving teams are usually “**groups of 5-12 employees from the same department who meet a few hours each week to discuss ways of improving quality efficiency, and the work environment**”
(Robbins and Judge, 2013)

Members of the team shares ideas and offer suggestions on how work processes and methods can be improved.

Problem - solving teams have a limited authority to implement the suggestions they give. They have to consult higher authorities before implementing their solutions.

(2) Self-Managed work teams: Self- managed teams are “**groups of 10-15 people who take on responsibilities of their former supervisors**” (Robbins and Judge, 2013).

Self-managed teams are given the authority to implement their solutions and are held responsible for the outcomes of their decisions.

The tasks of self-managed teams include

- (1) Planning and scheduling of work.
- (2) Assigning work to members.
- (3) Identifying and solving problems.
- (4) Dealing with suppliers and with customers.
- (5) Making operating decisions.

Some self-managed teams are given the freedom to select members of the team and evaluate the performance of the members.

In a self-managed team, the role and importance of the supervisor decreases substantially and eventually the position may be eliminated altogether.

Research has found that self-managed teams are not as effective as they appear to be. Some negative aspects of self-managed teams are:

- (1) **Conflict:** Studies have found that self-managed teams are unable to manage conflicts well.
- (2) **Cooperation and power struggle:** members of self-managed teams stop cooperating with each other when there are disputes between them. There is sometimes a power struggle and this can cause the performance of the group to go down.
- (3) **Absenteeism and turnover:** studies have found that self-managed teams often have higher levels of absenteeism and employee turnover rates.

A positive aspect of self-managed teams is that the members have higher levels of job satisfaction.

(3) Cross- functional teams: In a cross- functional teams “**employees from about the same hierarchical level but from different work areas to come together to accomplish a task**” (Robbins and Judge, 2013). Such teams usually composed of people from different speciality areas with the organization.

Cross-functional teams represent an effective way of bringing people from across the organization together to corporate with each other on diverse tasks needed to complete large and complex projects. Cross-functional teams are in some ways similar to social networking groups.

(4) Virtual teams: Virtual teams are “**teams that use computer technology to tie together physically dispersed members in order to achieve a common goal**” (Robbins and Judge, 2013).

In virtual teams, communications takes place on line in the form of e-mails or video- conferencing.

Although virtual teams have become very popular, they face certain challenges:

- (1) Studies have found that there is **less social rapport** in virtual teams
- (2) It has also been found that while virtual teams are good in sharing unique information, overall they share less information. In other words, the greater the level of virtuality of a team. Lesser is the levels information sharing.

Some measures that managements of organizations can take to improve the effectiveness of virtual teams are:

- (1) Create trust among team members.
- (2) Monitor the progress of the team closely and ensure that the team does not lose sight of its goal.
- (3) Publicizing the efforts and outcomes of the team so that the team does not remain invisible.

CREATING EFFECTIVE TEAMS

A great deal of research has been carried out to identify the characteristics of effective teams. Robbins and Judge (2013) have summarized the vast amount of research in to a model that describes the various factors that contribute to team effectiveness.

Robbins and Judge (2013) have organized the key factors that contribute to teams effectiveness into three broad categories:

- (1) Context
- (2) Composition
- (3) Process

CONTEXT

The context in which a team has to operate strongly influences its effectiveness. The four major contextual factors that influence team effectiveness and its performance are:

- (1) **Adequate resources:** A team can perform properly only if it has adequate resources and support available to it. a team is after all only a small part of a larger organisational system. in order to perform well it is dependent on resources outside the group but within the organisation.

If the team does not have adequate resources available it will not be able to perform its job properly and reach its goal. however, if the team received the right staff, timely information, administrative assistance and encouragement it will be able to perform effectively and deliver superior performance.

(2) **Leadership and structure:** For a team to be effective, it is very important that the work load is shared by all team members. It is also important that the team members know and agree on which each member is specifically supposed to do.

Team member must have clear and proper understanding about their role in the team as well as that of their team members. They should know what exactly they and their teammates are supposed to do in order to attain the team goals. Such clarity lets a team member act immediately without waiting for instructions.

Sound leadership plays an important role in ensuring that individual efforts and skills are integrated and fit together with the larger interest of the team.

Leadership is especially crucial when there are many teams operating at the same time. In multi team systems, the leader has to play the role of the facilitator. He must ensure that the the different teams work together towards the common cause rather than working against each other.

Teams in which members are empowered by giving them responsibility and leadership is shared or more effective in achieving its objectives then when a team has a single leadership structure.

(3) Climate of trust: Trust among team members and trust in the leader is crucial for a team to be effective. Interpersonal trust among members of the teams have several benefits:

- (a) It leads to better cooperation.
- (b) (b) There is a lesser need to monitor the work and behavior of team members.
- (c) © Team members start believing that other members will not take advantage of them.
- (d) Members are willing to take greater risks.
- (e) Members are willing to show their vulnerability or weakness if they have faith in their team members.

(4) Performance evaluation and reward system: A performance evaluation and reward system that focuses only on the individual affects team effectiveness. It is necessary to have a hybrid system that recognized the individual but also focuses on team performance. Such a contribution of individual members but also reward the entire group for good performance and results.

The reward system should be designed to encourage employees to work as team players. Rewards must encourage cooperative rather than competitive behavior. However, individual contributions should not be ignored altogether. The rewards should strike a fine balance between individual performance and team performance.

Profit sharing, appraisal based on group performance are some of the measures that managements can take to increase commitment to the team and make team more effective.

TEAM COMPOSITION

A team is not only good as its members. Effectiveness of teams is severely affected by how it is staffed- who are in the team. Some important factors relating to team composition that influence the effectiveness to a team are:

- (1) **Ability of team members:** the performance of the team is strongly affected by the knowledge, skills and abilities of its members. The ability of a team member plays a vital role in determining what a member can do and how well he will perform on the team.

Research has found that high ability teams (where most members are intelligent) perform better than low ability teams on task that require considerable thinking such as solving complex problems. Studies have also found that high ability teams adjust better to changing situations and are more effective in applying knowledge to new problems.

The leader's ability also matters. A smart team leader will help a member with low ability or when a team will help a member with low ability or when a team member is struggling at a task. A leader with low ability may not be able to get the best out of high ability teams.

(2) Personality of team members: The effectiveness of a team is affected by personality characteristics of its team members. The Big Five personality traits are closely related to team effectiveness. Research has found that:

- (a) A team performs better when the team is average on the trait of conscientiousness and high on trait of openness to experience.

This is because conscientious people can sense when their team members need help and support and they provide it.

Members who are high on openness make the team more creative and innovation because they communicate better and are more willing to express their ideas.

(b) Teams perform badly when they have one or more members who are low on the trait of agreeableness. That is, performance of the team suffers when it has one or more highly disagreeable members.

(c) The performance of the team is better when they have members who are high on personal organization, achievement orientation, endurance and constructive restructuring.

(3) Allocation of roles: An effective team requires its members to play different roles. According to Robbins and Judge (2013) there are nine potential roles the team members can play. These nine roles are:

- (a) Linker: role is to coordinate and integrate.
- (b) Creator: role is to initiate new ideas.
- (c) Promotor: role is to support ideas after they have been initiated.
- (d) Assessor: role is to offer insightful analysis of options.
- (e) Organizer: role is to provide structure.
- (f) Producer: role is to provide directions and follows through whether the directions have been carried out properly.
- (g) Controller: role is to examine details and enforce rules and guidelines that have been laid down.

(h) Maintainer: role is to fight external battles.

(i) Advisor: role is to encourage the search for more and new information.

Effective teams take care in allocating these roles to its team members. Successful teams allocate these roles to team members based on their experience, skills and preferences.

Leaders must understand the strength and weakness of an individual before selecting them in the team. He must then allocate the members the right role based on their strengths. Even if a team has members with high ability it would not be very effective if the members are not allocated their proper rules.

(4) Diversity of members: Team performance is affected by Team diversity. Organizational demography plays an important role in this regard. **Organizational demography refers to “the degree to which members of a work unit share a common demographic attribute such as age, sex, race, educational and the impact of this attribute on turnover”** (Robbin and Judge, 2013)

Employee turnover is likely to be higher when the demographic characteristics of some team members are different from those of majority of members in the teams.

This is because:

- (a) They find it more difficult to communicate. Thus conflicts are more likely to take place.
- (b) People find membership of the team less attractive when conflict increases. Thus they are more likely to quit.

(c) difference in demographic characteristics among members results in a power struggle. Those who lose this power struggle either quit voluntarily or are forced to quit.

Research on the impact of diversity on teams performance has yielded contradictory results:

- (a) Some studies have found team performance is unrelated to demographic diversity.
- (b) Race and gender diversity are negatively related to team performance.
- (c) Educational and expertise diversity are positively related to team performance but the impact is small and is affected by situational factors.

Good leadership can turn diversity into an advantage. Good leaders provide members of a diverse team with an inspirational common goal and focus the members attention on the work tasks to be achieved. They use the diversity in values, education, knowledge and skills among team members to take advantage of the team.

Cultural diversity is an asset when the team is not working on a task that requires a variety of viewpoints but a liability when the team works on a problem solving task.

(5) Size of the teams: Research has found that most effective teams have 5 to 9 members. It is the opinion of expert that a team should have the right number of people. It should have neither more or less.

Unfortunately, in most organisations managers create teams that are too large. When the team has more members than needed:

1. There is a decline in cohesiveness to accountability goes down.
2. Accountability goes down.
3. There is less communication.
4. There is more trouble and difficulty coordinating the effects of the team members. The problem of coordination becomes even more acute when the team is working under time pressure.
5. There is an increase in social loafing.

It is suggested that if a team is larger than required then it should divide into sub teams. It will result in better team effort.

(6) Member preferences: all employees are not team players. Only those individuals who like working in teams must be selected. The team's morale is threatened when individual who wanted to work alone are made part of a team. Such members are dissatisfied. Hence great care must be taken at the time of team selection. Individuals who like to work in groups and have the desired personality traits, skills, and abilities should be selected.

TEAM PROCESSES

Various processes which take place within the team can affect the effectiveness of the team. Some processes are beneficial to the group while others have negative effect on the team. These processes may range from commitment of the members, common goals, social loafing to how conflict is managed in the team. Mere formation of a team doesn't automatically guarantee high performance and effectiveness.

The Actual effectiveness of a group may be described by the following equation:

Actual group effectiveness = Potential gains - Process losses

Some of the processes that affect team effectiveness are as follows:

- (1) Common plan and purpose:** Effective teams know clearly what has to be done and how it should be done.

Effective teams:

- (a) Analyze and decide their mission
- (b) Develop and set goals to achieve that mission and
- (c) Create plans and strategies to achieve those goals.

Successful teams spend a lot of time and effort on deciding their common purpose. The common purpose is decided through a mutual agreement after a lot of discussions. The common purpose serves as a navigating star to the team and guides it through good and bad times.

Members of the team should agree on what is their goal. They should be clear as to whether their goal is to learn and master a task or to just perform a task. When members of the team differ in their goal perspectives (some members have learning goals and other performance goals), it reduces discussions and information sharing in the team.

Effective team also possesses the quality of reflexivity. According to Robbins and Judge (2013) reflexivity is “a team characteristic of reflecting on and adjusting the master plan when necessary.” In these fast changing times, an effective team must be willing to modify a good plan if the situation demands it. Teams that are high on reflexivity are able to handle better the conflicting ideas and goals of their team members.

(2) Specific goals: Successful teams have specific, measurable and realistic performance goals. It is easier for a team to maintain focus on achieving their results when goals are well defined and clear cut. It also improves communication within the team.

Research has found that team goals should be challenging. Goals that are difficult but achievable improves team performance.

(3) Team efficiency: Effective teams are high on team efficiency. They believe that they can achieve the goals that have been set and that they will eventually succeed.

When the team succeeds its team efficiency goes up. They feel confident about future success which in turn motivates the team to work harder.

Managements can increase team efficiency by:

- (a) Helping teams achieve small success. This builds up the confidence of the team members.
- (b) By providing members of the team with training that will enhance their technical and interpersonal skills. When members of the team are high on ability, they will have greater confidence and start believing that they can be successful.

(4) Mental models: In effective teams, members of the team share the same mental models. Robbins and Judge (2013) described mental model as a “**team members knowledge and beliefs about how the work gets done by the team.**”

It is very important that team members share similar mental models. When team members have wrong mental models or models that are not similar, then team performance suffers. This is because the team members are more likely to fight and get conflicts regarding how, when and what should be done.

A number of studies have been shown that when team members share the same mental model then:

- (a) There is greater interaction among team members.
- (b) Teams members are motivated to have positive attitudes towards their work.
- (c) The team performance is much better.

(5) Levels of conflict: Moderate levels of conflict can actually improve team effectiveness. This is especially true when they are task conflicts. Task conflicts result in greater discussions and critical evaluation of problems and alternatives. This improves the quality of team decisions. It also increases team creativity. Too little or too much task conflicts has a negative effect on performance.

Relationship conflicts are mostly dysfunctional and has a negative effect on the team's effectiveness. In relationship conflicts there is tension, incompatibility and dislike among members of the team.

The effectiveness of teams is also affected by how they resolve their conflicts. Effective teams resolve conflicts by openly talking about issues and problem. Ineffective teams focus more on an individual personality and how things were said.

(6) Social loafing: There is less social loafing in effective teams. This is because effective teams make their members individual and jointly responsible for the team's purpose, goals and approach. Members of the team are aware about what they are individually and jointly responsible for.