



LEADERSHIP ACUMEN Issue 10

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Is Your “Team” Really Working as a *Team*?

Introduction:

The concept of “team” is very strong in business today:

- Are you a Team player?
- Can you motivate and enhance the performance of your Team?
- Team success is shared
- Team failure is accepted by the leader
- Knowledge and experience sharing throughout the team leads to innovations and greater value creation

This said, not all environments actually support team behaviour

- we often reward, recognize and coach individually
- we consistently make heroes out of individuals
- personal expertise and strengths are admired/encouraged
- we don’t actually take the time to foster teamwork

Actually, none of the above is surprising though it might seem that way. We use the “team” concept very loosely, and actually deliver true *team* behaviour infrequently. And yet, there is great validity in the workplace and community for structures other than Teams: Groups, and collections of Individuals.

Individual contributors form a strong foundation of an organization. Good people, performing competently the things they are expected to deliver, to a standard of satisfaction or excellence that is both self- and supervisor – defined, is a basic necessity in organizations.

A **group** of organized individuals working together in a common environment or a common project is commonplace. They share information and/or expertise, divide up the workload and achieve against deadlines, client expectations and/or parameters set out by the group’s leader/manager.

Teams share a common purpose or clearly defined goal. Often there is a minimum competency required to be selected for the team, and an even higher set of expectations developed from amongst the other team members. Team members integrate their actions collaboratively, cover for one another, proactively sense the needs of one another, and deliver whatever they can to lift-up the overall success of the team to meet and often exceed objectives.

Every Organization Needs All Three Elements

- Great Individual contributors
- Groups interacting and working together to face common challenges
- Teams defining their own success and pushing the boundaries of excellence and results in pursuit of a seemingly “stretch” or even “unreasonable” goal.

Every leader needs to consider the requirements for their organization, and the time/energy they have to give. The role of the leader is different in each of the three cases – with different demands on the leader, and different results opportunities.

	Individuals	Groups	Teams
Expertise	Defined by individual skill sets, knowledge and experience. Expertise walks out the door when the employee leaves.	Individual skills and knowledge can be enhanced by sharing and information from others in the group. Expertise still leaves with the employee, with little cross-training or structured knowledge management; however, some members of the group have elements transferred as a result of sharing.	Expertise is brought together by individual team members, shared, leveraged, combined into new patterns and innovations. Other team members' expertise grows and develops new capacity. When a member leaves, the team retains not only the original knowledge but the synergies from that expertise within the team.
Motivation	Self-motivation and motivation of the supervisor/leader. Motivation to attain/exceed a standard or pursuit of personal excellence.	Self-motivation and that of the leader. Competitive motivation with other group members. Motivation from working with others on task, and input from within the group. Leader remains point of reference for motivation.	Self-motivation, plus that of a team-defined goal, produces clear, uplifting, and sustained "drive". Shared motivation with other team members, carries each other through the up and down cycles, and encourages higher levels of commitment.
Accountability	To do the task(s) to the best of their ability, to the supervisor for achieving individual objectives.	To do their task to best of ability. To share information and provide input to other group members in a co-operative/ proactive manner. To achieve results as expected.	To self, to team leader, to other team members. To carry out their own role and help others maximize their own effectiveness. To reach or exceed the goal.
Goals	Defined by supervisor and/or self and/or customer. Within the parameters of individual performance.	Larger than 1 person can attain, group goals can be motivating as long as external motivators/ rewards are significant and positive. Defined mainly by leader.	Facilitated by leader, team defines own goals, and members share a personal 'stake' or 'ownership'. This drives motivation, and also keeps the goal foremost in the mind of all team members. Goals defined are usually higher than in Groups or Individuals.
Rewards	Based upon individual performance, usually more narrow.	May be part of a larger context of group achievement, but usually distributed individually based on contribution to group. Individuals may even have different levels of reward based on leader's perceived value of the team members.	Can include both individual and team-wide benefit; however team must succeed first to trigger individual or shared rewards. Because the team goals and performance usually holds bigger benefit, shared rewards are usually higher than individual.

In leading a collection of individuals, the leader must recruit competent people and clarify the expectations for each person. Often they direct each person's activities or performance requirements. Each individual's reference point is back to the leader – for regular clarification, context and recognition. The leader gets to know each person individually, their strengths and weaknesses, and challenges them to attain levels of excellence individually.

This of course, is very time consuming for the leader, but can be rewarded by 'the sum of the parts' adding up to excellent contributions to the organization, clients and community.

Leading a group requires more from a leader. The individuals now need to relate to one another, see the overall project/challenge and the breakdown of roles and responsibilities. As a result, assembling individuals that can work together effectively is important. Because they are inter-connected and often depend on others in the group for information or contributions in order to do their work, they must co-operate and preferably do so in a proactive vs. reactive manner.

Here the leader remains the reference point for each member of the group. If "good", she/he will see the overall picture and workings of the different group members and orchestrate inter-connections as required. While there is some natural motivation that comes from working together, there is also some natural inter-competitiveness. The group leader must maintain positive motivation, contain competitiveness, invite input, and energize the group towards attaining the leader-defined objectives – on time, on quality, and within budget. This is demanding leadership/management work, and can consume 110% of the leader's time in coaching, firefighting, motivating, "stroking", and connecting.

The payoff of course, is that a group can take on bigger challenges and projects, divide and conquer complex tasks and usually perform at a higher efficiency level than a collection of individuals. However, groups are inherently risky and vulnerable to shifting morale and inter competitiveness.

Leading a Team is a significant step forward over a group. And, it also requires significant effort up-front from the leader in both recruiting excellent team members and developing the environment for a highly impassioned pursuit of a meaningful, empowering goal.

The leader must now facilitate the coming together of team members – the exploration of one another's areas of expertise, talent, insight, personality, commitment, etc. (*Forming & Storming*) Next, the leader must "hold" the environment for team members to define their own vision/goals (in line with the parameters and challenges made visible by the leader). This self-definition of goal also requires the self-definition of team member roles, codes of conduct, commitment, cross-support and so-on. This *Norming* process is the major distinguishing difference between a group and a team.

Without this Norming stage, there is no team – no matter what we might label them!

Finally, the team gets on with achieving or surpassing their goals – they motivate one another, share, dream, invent, co-create and collaborate together in the process. (*Performing*) The role of team leader now becomes one of coach/mentor, recognizer/champion, clarifier, resource provider, and sometimes 'blockage eliminator'. The up-front investment of time and energy and facilitation, plus the risk-taking in moving to a self-directed team environment, and the need for a "ramp-up" period before performance kicks in, is usually rewarded by two things:

- ✓ Increased performance, enhanced achievement, and innovation – greater than the sum of the parts.
- ✓ More time for the leader to get away from the firefighting and spend time viewing the bigger picture, plus strategizing for the future.

Consider Your Organization Today

Now, think of the organization you lead. What do you have in place today? What do you want for tomorrow? How might you change your leadership practices?

As mentioned earlier, all three approaches are valuable and required in organizations today. Often we have all three working simultaneously inside an organization, involving the same people. In other situations, organizations are marked by one particular style, usually driven by the approach taken by the senior leaders.

As leaders however, if we want teams, let's not underestimate what is expected of us as team leaders. If we are exerting "group management" or "individual supervision" practices ourselves, let's not expect team-like behaviours and results from our people.

Alternatively, if we really do want the "magic" of teams; if we really subscribe to the potential and pay-off of the team concepts; then let's tune-up our personal team leadership practices to better facilitate collaborative, innovative, high-performance team environments in our workplace.

Exploring The Web!

This month, the connections take you to sites with more perspectives on teams, and team leadership. Add some 'grist' for your leadership mill...

http://www.bizjournals.com/extraedge/consultants/at_work/2003/03/24/column56.html
Finding the Remedy for an ailing Team. Bizjournal article. March 2003.

<http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/educatrs/leadrshp/le2diffs.htm>
Summary of Team Leadership differences from Traditional Leadership, North Central Regional Educational Laboratory. 8 Key Points.

<http://hrweb.berkeley.edu/guide/teams.htm>
Guide To Managing Human Resources – Chapter 14: Team Building.
University of California, Berkeley, Office of Human Resources.

<http://leadership.monster.com/archives/team/>
Overcoming Team Conflict on Monster.com

<http://oakbrookonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2006/03/The%20Five%20Dysfunctions%20of%20a%20Team.Lencioni.pdf>
Summary – The Five Dysfunctions of a Team

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