

REFLECTIONS ON HOW THE TEAMS PLAY WITHIN COMPANIES

Cibela NEAGU

Universitatea „ARTIFEX” București

Cezar BRAICU

Universitatea „Spiru Haret” București

Aurel NEAGU

Academia de Poliție „AL. I. Cuza” București

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, we face new demands that have turned the teamwork into a crucial and stimulating issue. To stand firm in front of the surging pressure on the global market, the organizations should let go of their rigid hierarchical structures, in favor to more flexible organic configuration. Therefore, organizations are always searching to improve the team performance. They intend to build and support the best performing team, able to understand the organization business goals and, thus, to contribute to the organizational success.

KEYWORDS: *workgroup, work team, formal group, informal group, individual behavior*

1. Work group versus work team

The concept of 'work group' emerged as a result of research studies done by Elton Mayo and team, some time between 1920 and 1930. In his attempt to find an answer to a series of contradicting facts he was certain about – the growth of labor productivity, even in precarious labor conditions – Mayo concluded that people in the industrial groups develop groups, mostly as defense means against the formal constraints, plus to satisfy certain social and human needs.

The concept of team was put in the spotlight between 1970 and 1975 by Leavitt [4], who came up with the idea that the work team was actually the basic unit in an organization.

For some authors, the two concepts are all alike. But, in spite of their semblance, the organizational theories are more strict and place an inequality sign between the two. Thus, a group is an assemble of people who performs an activity or an action, under the supervision of a manager. Huczynski and Buchanan [1] (2007) define the organizational groups as an association of at least two and maximum 30 people who interact by means of a communication network and relying on a structure of roles and norms, with the purpose to reach a superordinate purpose – therefore, they develop a common identity, following those interactions.

In a group, a person acts individually, pursuing his own interests that, by chance, may coincide with those belonging to others. On the contrary, the members in a team act collectively and ,as one', cooperating to achieve the outcome desired by all members.

Adair [5] (1986) states that the work team is something more than a group of people with a common objective; the economic superiority derives from the fact that the individual contributions are considered as complementary. He says that a team is good, i.e. efficient, should its members are able to work as a team even when they are not together; in this way, they rather participate into a succession of activities than a common task, which would require their presence in a certain place and a certain moment of time.'

The work team is still a work group, but different, in the sense that it holds three specific properties: the individual's action is inter-dependent and coordinate; each member has a well-defined role and there are common objectives and goals.

Richard Cherrington [8] (1994) lists more shaping features for the *work groups*, as follows:

- The group member interact frequently. They are defined, perceived and considered by the others as members of the group.
- They share common norms and submit to a set of formal and informal rules, having in mind to attain the same goal.
- They are part of a system of interacting roles;
- They know one another and interact in the same way;
- They share a collective insight of unity, and the individual goals are inter-dependent and subjected to the common goal of the group.
- They act ,as one', compared to the external environment.

Practice says that a group of 5-7 members is the most desirable; the reason is that the more homogenous the group, the more easily the inter-personal relations are building – and such relations facilitate communication, coordination, and therefore the chances of reaching a consensus are greater. The bigger the group, the lower satisfaction level of the members and so is the possibility to reach an agreement and to have a reasonable level of individual participation of the group members.

The key elements for the *work team* are as below:

- The existence of a social system, which is recognized as entity by its members.
- The respective social system is complete, i.e. its roles are differentiated and inter-dependent in reaching the goals;
- One or more tasks have to be accomplished (a collective responsibility of the system which is a essential criterion for evaluation);
- The system acts in an environment that has certain expectations towards it, but also rights and responsibilities.

As a conclusion, a team is a group of people who cannot, at least not efficiently, do their job without the others.

2. Types of work groups and work teams

An organization displays different types of groups. They fall into two more important categories: *formal groups* and *informal groups*.

Most organizations have more formal and informal groups. The formal groups produce the informal, but sometimes things happen the other way around (for example, when a group of friends starts a business.)

* **The formal group** is a group that the organization creates, with a clear purpose. The formal groups are described by the following *features*: they are initiated and found on official documents and norms; they have a lucrative purpose; they belong to the organization's organizational structure; the internal regulations are official and mandatory; they change along with the organizational extensive alteration of the structure (reorganization) and they are managed by a hierarchical leader officially appointed on that position.

There are two types of formal groups: functional and operational.

▪ *The functional group (of leadership)* is a formal group, made up of a manager and all his subordinates (for eg. the marketing, finance departments, etc.) Each work unit (manager and subordinates) is considered to be a functional group. Among the functional group located on different levels, the connection is a person who provides their coordination – a person who is superior for the group on the inferior hierarchical level and subordinate for the group on the superior level.

▪ In essence, the organizations include functional or leadership groups, in a pyramidal structure, and connections that contribute to their coordination.

▪ *The operational group* is a formal group, created with a certain purpose, which substitutes or replaces the work usually done by the functional groups (for eg. the production project team). This group may be created temporarily, just to solve a specific problem, within a definite period of time – or it may be initiated relatively permanent – for the latter case, the group is being assigned to solve recurrent problems in various fields, for a non-definite period of time.

***The informal group** is a group rather created by the employees and not by the organization, to serve the interests of the group members and their social needs (for eg. the members of the group eating their meals together).

The *features* of the informal groups are as follows: they are made up themselves spontaneously based on joint interests and concerns of the shared dissatisfaction felt towards the direct supervisors, the seniority; they aim to take care of their own interests, to promote an idea; they belong to a non-formal structure: they closely abide by non-mandatory, elective regulations; they stay the same even after the change in the official structures and they are chaired by an informal leader, elected upon his competence and authority.

The informal groups may or may not back up the organization goals. For instance, the spontaneous feelings trigger spontaneous actions that interfere with the requested actions.

The management of the informal group is appointed to an *informal leader* who congregates the group members around him, thanks to his qualities. Therefore, he will gain what is called *informal authority*.

The classification of the work teams.

I. A first classification is suggested by Larson and LaFasto (1989) into:

- a) problem-solving teams
 - b) creation teams
 - c) tactical teams
- a) The problem-solving teams are initiated when the organizations have to deal with a problem that needs a quick and economical fixing. The task of the team is to find and present solutions to the organization, which will retain the best one.
 - b) The creation teams – are similar to the a) ones but, unlike them, they are focused on finding the novelty – not any solutions, but the original ones.
 - c) The tactical teams have the duty to execute well-defined plans.

II. Another classification (upon the empowerment level of the work team – this empowerment, habilitation is seen as the integration between autonomy and power) is shown below:

- a) *Traditional teams* – built by a superior to whom the other members give account to, individually. Consequently, the relations among the (equal) members are occasional. Also, these members do not really interact in order to reach common goals.
- b) *Consultancy work teams* – appropriate for giving solutions to various organizational issues, especially technical ones. The solutions are made known to the top hierarchical levels, who analyze them and, then, accept or reject them.
- c) *Ad-hoc work teams* – they are created ‘on the spot’, whenever the need for a solution to a problem arises.
- d) *Self-managed work teams* – they are made up of inter-dependent members, supervised by a coordinator who is the link to the organization.

3. The impact of the groups upon the individual behavior

The group exerts a strong influence upon the individual behavior. It provides information, opportunities and creates the possibility of reaching its members’ goals.

People behave differently when they are in a group, in comparison with the action at an individual level. The group puts a pressure on each and every member, translated as expectations in terms of how the group will follow the rules – and exactly these expectations influence the individual behavior. But there is also a symmetry, in the sense that the behavior of each member affects the entire group.

The work group provides the frame where the employees:

- develop their personal competencies;
- give a shape to their attitudes;
- increase their motivation;
- they pluck up their courage in accomplishing their tasks;
- the newcomers in the organization benefit from a quicker adjustment;
- they gain self-confidence;
- they feel safe;
- they find their identity;
- they fulfill their needs of security, sense of belonging and esteem

To know the behavior and to understand the importance of the work group may actually help the management reach their objectives within the organization. The groups allow people to work better and use their abilities proficiently. But the bottom line is that the managers should be aware of their 'power' and use it wisely.

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