Management of Performing Teams in the Conditions of a VUCA Environment

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Abstract

Team management is an essential concept, increasingly widespread, in order to form a united, performing and successful team that will be able to achieve the set goals. Managing a team means creating a balance between its needs and the needs of each team member, between the freedom that employees need to be creative and taking responsibility for their actions.

Moreover, in our time, there is an increased emphasis on the operation of virtual teams at the most professional level. The article presents the vision approached in the literature on this subject and the institutional implications.

All of this, with the corollary of the managerial approach from the perspectives of managing performance within teams, their delimitation from the group notion and the implications within an organization, are key points analyzed in the article, in correlation with a VUCA environment.

1. Introduction

The structure of the article is based on the research of the study of the literature in the context of defining teams, types of teams, factors that influence the performance of the teams, the influence and importance of virtual teams by indicating their characteristics, but also of the established types, ending with the managerial approach in the context of the existence of VUCA factors in a general way in an organization.

The importance of teams as management tools is largely determined by the fact that they contribute to a greater involvement of employees in the process of activity, providing them with an additional position of authority.

At the same time, team performance management involves recurring activities to set team goals, monitor progress towards goals, and make adjustments to achieve those goals more effectively and efficiently. From a systems perspective, the overall goal of team performance management is to ensure that the team and all its members work together in an optimal way to achieve the desired results of the team manager (Sisu, J. A. et al., 2024).

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The formation and management of a team, but especially of a performing team, needs time and patience, a sustained investment and a well-defined process structure. An excessively relational approach is used, focused on people and not on the results of joint work, that define in fact the role of leadership.

2. Defining the team

According to Dexonline, the team represents a group of people who, under the leadership of a chairman, simultaneously perform a joint work or action.

Belbin (1981) defines a team as a group of people with different skills and tasks, working together for a common goal or project, whose functions are harmoniously intertwined and which support each other.

Adair (1986) presents the team as a group, in which the contribution of individuals is complementary, for a common purpose, conditioned by an effective collaboration based on understanding and assuming roles.

Katzenbach & Smith (1993) considers the team as a small number of people with complementary skills that pursue a goal, goals to achieve and a common approach, for which they consider each other responsible.

Cole (2000) considers that team is something more than a group of people who have a common goal - is a group where individual contributions are considered complementary. Collaboration, working together is fundamental note of the work team.

Militaru (2005) defines team as a group whose individual efforts result in a performance that is greater than the sum of individual results. Therefore, a working team generates positive synergy through coordination of effort.

According to Arădăvoaice (2008), a team has a clearly defined objective and by common and collective action generate synergy, people get more than if they work separately. The team is not a collection of individuality. Their quality and performance are determined by the amount of interaction between members as a component. Team creates synergy, which means that the whole is greater than the sum of it up, the relationship between parties is also an intrinsic part of the whole.

Pastor (2005) defines the team as a group of people who work under a chief. Relationships between group members are dependent; they satisfy predetermined tasks to achieve a common goal. Although, the quality of a team is influenced by the quality of each individual, it constitutes a distinct entity.

Referring to a real team, Burciu (2008) presents the following defining features: a small number of members, some qualifications/complementary skills, a full understanding of the purpose, a product/service jointly produced, a clear conception about work/jobs, a sense of mutual responsibility.

Belbin (2004) defines the team role as *"a person's specific tendency to behave, contribute and interact with others."*

But in organizations we meet not only working groups and teams. Spiegel and Torres (1994), distinguish between teams and other forms of group work, as:

Committees are the most common working groups formed by management to solve strict tasks. Task groups are formed top management groups with a well-established purpose to solve an important problem in a special situation. The groups created to improve processes are groups of experts from different fields;

The team is the most developed form of the groups, the team is a special working group that needs to be organized and coordinated differently than the other groups; teams are made up of individuals who work alongside others in a competitive environment, but are not in competition with the other teams in the organization, but are in competition with waste, non-compliance with deadlines, with unnecessary, worthless work, with low productivity, but also in competition with other market players.

Differences between group and team

Table 1

The group of work	The team
Has a powerfull leader.	Leadership roles are distributed.
Individual responsibility.	Individual or common responsibility.
The purpose of the group is identical to the organizational mission.	The team also has its own goals.
The products of the group are individual.	The team's products are collective.
Effective group discussions are preferred.	Open disputes and active problem solutions are encouraged.
Performance evaluation is carried out indirectly.	Assessment is carried out directly by measuring collective performance.
Group members discuss, decide, delegate.	Team members discuss, decide and jointly realize what they have decided.

Source: Katzenbach 1993

The most well-known and widespread model of evolution of the Tuckman team (1965), involves 5 stages: training, agitation, norming, operation stage and interruption of activity.

Drucker (1993) says that managers must lead through goals, take more risks over a longer period, make strategic decisions, create integrated and well-motivated teams, and convey information quickly and clearly and demonstrate competence and devotion. Managers are responsible for results.

Lencioni (2006) believes that most executives do not realize that the internal health of a company is the key to its success. And health depends on building a high-performance leadership team.

3. Factors that contribute to the formation of a team

The team-building process is based on four elements. The first element is the executive improvement team, to which belongs the initiative of organizing operative groups, departmental improvement teams, or other types of teams; the second element is the team members themselves; the third element is its leader; the fourth, the one who initiates it, according to Harrington (2000).

Arădăvoaice (2008) shows that the selection of the most suitable people must be carried out according to a set of criteria and factors, such as:

- specialized professional training in accordance with the specifics of the field of activity, experience, integrity, well-defined personality, firm and principled attitude, loyal to the institution, the leader and those with whom he works, and team spirit, the ability to provide the group with its full potential for work, the power and the ability to spot the dysfunctions, their causes and to propose solutions for improving work, relational skills to establish and maintain correct human relations, moral strength for eventual failures, strength to communicate directly to the boss what aspects of the act of leadership are deficient to formulate and advance new working methods, creativity, innovative spirit, concern for the implementation of novelty elements for radical changes when the needs of work require it.

The objectives of teamwork could be agreed under the conditions characterized by Mc.Gregor (1960) as the following: the atmosphere tends to be unofficial, comfortable and relaxed, there are many discussions taking place in which each initially participates, but they remain focused on the task of the group, the task of the team is well understood and accepted by its members (Cristache, N., et al., 2022).

Free discussions take place up to a certain point when the goal is formulated so that all team members agree to assume, members listen to each other. Every idea enjoys an audience. People are not afraid that they might be ironed when advancing a creative idea, even if it is unusual, there are disagreements.

They are not eliminated or disregarded by a premature action of the team. Most decisions are made by consensus, being clear that everyone agrees and wants to go further. The team does not accept a simple majority of votes, as a basis for action, criticism is frequent, sincere and in a calm tone. Rarely can one speak of attacks in person, even in an indirect form, the leader does not dominate the team, and the team does not take into account his role unreasonably.

The power struggle is hardly present in the team's operating mode. The problem is not "who controls" but "how the job should be done".

Building an effective team requires a good design of teamwork, in which are specified the goals to be achieved, the strategy and sequence of steps, specific tasks, the required number of people, the roles they must fulfill and the skills they must possess.

High-performing teams exhibit seven key factors: strong leadership, clear communication, trust and collaboration, diversity and inclusion, accountability, continuous learning and improvement and a results-oriented approach. These attributes form the foundation for success, allowing teams to work effectively and achieve their goals.

To create a high-performing team, leaders should focus on building a positive team culture that embraces open communication, trust and collaboration. Providing regular feedback and recognition for individual and collective achievements is essential for maintaining motivation and fostering a sense of belonging. Establishing clear goals ensures that all team members work in harmony towards a common objective, while investing in employee development and training promotes continuous learning, adaptability, and innovation.

Creating a high-performing team takes time, effort and commitment from both leaders and team members. However, the rewards of cultivating such a team are significant, as they translate into success, a positive workplace culture and a solid foundation for long-term growth. By developing these seven core characteristics of high performing teams, organizations can effectively tackle challenges, capitalize on opportunities and achieve their desired outcomes, sourse internet.

4. Types of teams

"To make part of a team or group that provides security, acceptance and a sense of belonging is a fundamental necessity for most people" H. James Harrington.

Tuckman's Theory (1965) considers that an important point is that the team must go over these five stages to achieve its full potential and according to this theory, the first approach is when the group members first meet and the last moment happens when the team finishes the project.

After analyzing several groups and studying the development of humans in groups, their behaviour and interaction referred to the task activity, Tuckman defines four summarize stages knowing that this can be subject to further change due to them being a statement of data (Tuckman & Jensen 2010):

- **Forming** is a period of testing and orientation in which members learn about each other and evaluate the benefits and costs of continued membership. People tend to be polite, will defer to authority and try to find out what is expected of them and how they will fit into the team.
- **Storming** is a stage that is marked by interpersonal conflict as members become more proactive and compete for various team roles. Members try to establish norms of appropriate behaviour and performance standards.

- **Norming** stage is where the team develops its first real sense of cohesion as roles are established and a consensus forms around group objectives and a common or complementary team-based mental model.
- **Performing** is where the team members have learned to efficiently coordinate and resolve conflicts. In high-performance teams, members are highly cooperative, have a high level of trust in each other, are committed to group objectives and identify with the team.
- **Adjourning** is the final stage that occurs when the team is about to disband. Team members shift their attention away from task orientation to a relationship focus.

Figure 1. Tuckman's Model of Group Development
Source: e-Campus Ontario

As stated in the management treaties, the group is not a mere gathering of people. Rather he represents *„a number of people interacting with each other, they are psychologically aware of the existence the other members of the group and perceive themselves as representing a group"*. Schein (1965)

The groups in the organization are divided specifically into two basic categories: *formal groups* and *informal groups*.

A formal group is a group that exists within an organization by virtue of the management's desire for the execution of tasks that lead to the achievement of the organization's goals. Schein (1965)

Two formal groups that often exist in the organization are the committees and working teams. Certo (2002)

Bernard (1965) suggested that the evolution of the group is a four-step process, during which the group learns how to use its reserves, as follows:

- Stage of acceptance. It is common for members of a new group to initially have some distrust of one another.
- Communication and decision-making phase. Once they have passed the acceptance stage, group members are better able to communicate openly with each other.
- Solidarity phase of the group. Group solidarity occurs naturally as mutual acceptance increases and communication and decision-making within the group continues.
- Group control stage. Group members seek to maximise the group's success by agreeing individual capacities with group activities and by supporting each other.

The informal group is a group of people whose common work experiences give rise to a system of interpersonal relationships that extends beyond the boundaries of the relationships established by management.

Certo (2002), claims that teams in organizations take different forms. Organizations typically meet: problem-solving teams, self-managed teams, and cross-functional teams.

"Organization is a social invention designed to achieve common goals through group effort", said G.Jhons (1996)

After Harrington H. J., Harrington J. S., op. cit., p. 213, the types of teams most commonly used in Western organizations are as follows: departmental improvement teams, process improvement teams/multifunctional teams, operational teams, autonomous working teams; operational groups.

Devine (2002) claims that although the team concept is relatively simple, social scientists have identified several different types of teams. In general, teams either act as information processors or take a more active role in the task and actually perform activities. Common categories and subtypes of teams include:
- Advisory teams that make suggestions about a final product.
- Command team, the purpose of which is to combine instructions and coordinate action between management.
- The executive team, which develops plans for activities and then directs these activities.
- Project teams, used only for a period of time.
- The sports team is a group of people who play together (often team sports).
- Virtual teams. Developments in information and communication technology have led to the emergence of the virtual work team. A virtual team is a group of people who work interdependently and with a common purpose across space, time and organizational boundaries using technology to communicate and collaborate. Virtual team members can be located in a country or around the world, rarely meet face to face and include members from different cultures.

- Work teams are responsible for the real act of creating tangible products and services. Teamwork has advantages both professionally and personally.

Team functioning is based on communication between members, who come from diverse backgrounds and can be very different from each other as typology. The best teams prioritize ethical behavior and integrity, providing a positive example for employees and gaining the trust and respect of stakeholders.

5. Characteristics of virtual teams

Technology has an impact on how the team works and how it hosts its meetings. The development of communication technologies has generated emerging teams from the members and are not called of anybody from the organization to virtual teams. The systems that allow organizing video conferences and forums/platforms have improved the skills of employees to meet, conduct business, share and use documents and make decisions without finding everyone in the same location.

Virtual teams are groups of people who work interdependently with shared purposes beyond space, beyond space, organizational time and boundaries using technology to accommodate and collaborate.

Members of a virtual team can be located anywhere in the world, meet face to face, belong to different cultures.

The features of efficient team are, according to Chiric (1996), the development of strategies providing the roles and responsabilities for the products of work, passing the importance from individual to group.

According to Duarte & Snyder, (2006, p. 8), there are two reasons why virtual team events are more complex: they cross time-related boundaries, distance (geography) and organizations and use electronic/technological methods of communication.

With the rise of globalization, virtual teams are now more common, as Iorio & Taylor (2015, p. 395) argues, because organizations need to gain a competitive advantage and be adaptable to survive, from the perspective of Duarte & Snyder (2006, p. 3).

Using virtual teams allows organizations to access specialist knowledge regardless of location as Iorio & Taylor (2015, p. 395) supports, thus increasing business viability in Duarte's vision & Snyder (2006, p. 3). Consequently, leadership skills now need to include virtual leadership teams to ensure organizational and project success, according to Duarte & Snyder (2006, p. 4).

The characteristics of virtual teams are often composed of globally distributed experts, often incorporating employees who work from home; A virtual team is a group that works towards a common goal without geographical barriers, organizational and temporal, as Duarte & Snyder (2006, p. 5).
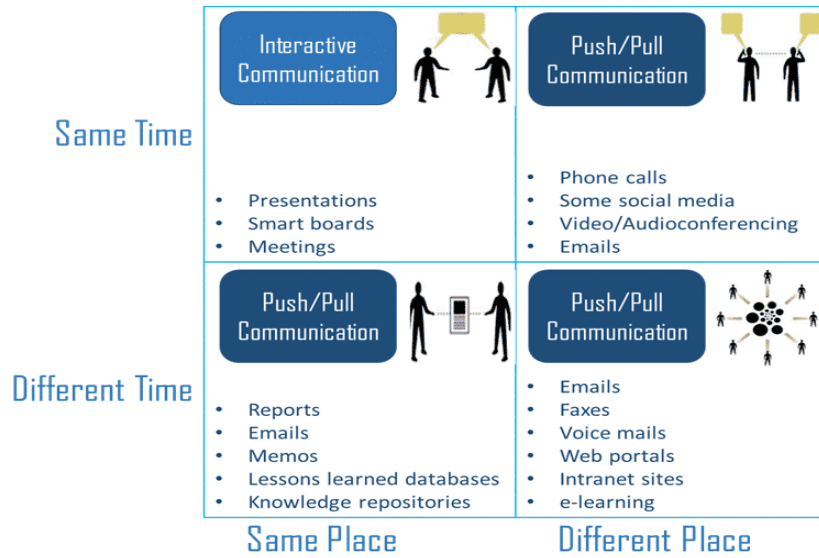
Figure 2. Communication characteristics of the virtual team
Source: Duarte & Snyder (2006)

Virtual team members have specific characteristics: the ability to work in unstructured /dynamic environments and specific skills including project management, networks, communication technologies, boundary setting, time management, etc, cultural sensitivity and interpersonal awareness, as Duarte & Snyder (2006, p. 23).

Leadership is essential for virtual teams and succes projects from the perspective of Tyssen et al. (2013, p. 53). Research shows that both charismatic and team-oriented leadership behavior provide success when working with virtual teams because they transcend cultural issues, from the position of Gundersen et al. (2012, pp. 47).

It is essential that the leaders of these teams create trust, as Weimann et al. (2013, p. 348) argues, and define clear goals and expectations, from Gundersen et al. (2012, pp. 52).

Leaders must be technologically adept and must ensure that they gain training and experience in forming virtual teams before they become leaders; facilitation skills and willingness to use technology are important, as is the desire to be flexible and adaptable, and leadership by example is essential, leaders shape the behavior they want to see, as Duarte & Snyder (2006, pp. 16-22).

Tipuri de echipe virtuale
Teams in the network
In general, the teams in the network are distributed geographically and not necessarily from the same organization. These teams are created frequently and

equally often dissolved; they are usually formed to discuss specific topics in which members of the area of expertise, possibly from different organizations, they express their ideas in the same discussion. Depending on the complexity of the problem, additional team members can be added at any time. The duration of this team can vary significantly depending on how quickly or slowly the problem is solved.

Parallel teams

Parallel teams are highly task-oriented teams that typically consist of specialized professionals. Although they are generally only needed for a very short period of time, unlike the teams in the network, they are not dissolved after completing tasks. The team may be internal or external to the organization.

Project development teams

Similar to parallel teams, these teams are geographically distributed and can operate from different time zones. Project development teams focus mainly on creating new products, information systems or organizational processes for users and /or customers.

Working, production or functional teams

These teams are entirely specific to the function in which they work only in a specific area within an organization (eg., finance, training, research, etc.). Operating from virtually different geographic locations, these teams exist to perform regular or ongoing tasks.

The service teams

Service teams are geographically located in different time zones and assigned to a particular service, such as customer support, network updates, data maintenance, etc.

Teams offshore ISD

Offshore ISD outsourcing teams are independent teams of service providers to which a company can subcontract parts of its work. These teams usually work together with a ground team. Offshore ISD is commonly used for software development as well as for international research and development projects.
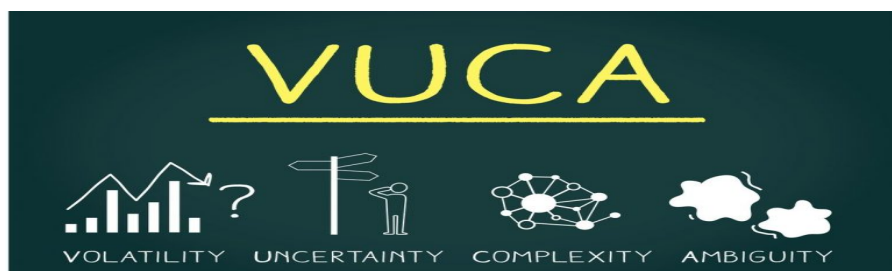
6. VUCA enviroment

Figure 3. VUCA enviroment
Source: https://project-e.ro/2020/06/29

VUCA is an acronym for Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity

It is the four-plane definition of the world in which business fights for profit, efficiency and market. The difficulty arises because it is impossible to build a plan that responds, but you need to develop four directions in response to the four challenges. The answer is still VUCA – Vision, Understanding, Clarity, Agility.

The acronym and concept of „VUCA" were introduced into the literature in the early '90s through some documents of planning, organizing and conducting academic work, as Nogami, Colestock, argue, Fenix (1989).

The acronym VUCA describes the resulting world at the end of the Cold War, namely a more volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world, said Kinsinger and Walch (2012).

In Johansen's conception (2007), the antidote to VUCA, called „VUCA Prim", is a projection in which volatility is mitigated by „vision", uncertainty is abolished by „understanding", the, complexity is faced with „clarity", which counteracts not only the complexity, but also the lack of information, in the effort to give „sense of chaos", and ambiguity is replaced by „agility".

In this metamorphosis of VUCA in VUCA Prim, the author states, cognitive, social, emotional, spiritual and physical intelligence will be required in equal parts, generating a self-regulating mechanism of adaptation and creative flexibility to any VUCA challenge in the outdoor environment, having behind it a new competence, called generic „tolerance to ambiguity".

In a similar view, Hinnsen proposes the acronym VACINE signifying Speed, Agility, Creativity, Innovation, Network (interconnection) and Experimentation, demonstrating that the demobilizing and disruptive effects of VUCA do not constitute a fatality.

Figure 4. What is VUCA?
Source: https://dorusupeala.ro/leadership-in-epoca-agilitatii-cum-se-formeaza-liderul-vuca

7. Managerial approaches within performing teams in a VUCA environment.

In a VUCA environment, innovation presents itself as a vital feature of organizations. Innovation can be a procedure for using new knowledge, or even using existing knowledge, so that new processes, services, knowledge or products are realized, according to Plessis (2007).

Innovation capability can be defined as the ability of an organization to innovate more; in other words, it represents the potential of the organization to achieve innovative results, argue by Neely et al. (2001)

In particular, innovation means the ability of a firm to create new knowledge (e.g., intellectual property) and successfully implement applicable knowledge and creative ideas to achieve market value. Zhao et al. (2005).

The configuration of work follows the course of radical transformations in the VUCA era, which drastically affects the management of human capital. In the 1990s, the impact of automation helped to eliminate a considerable number of jobs, especially those of middle managers, according to Rifkin (1995).

The same author argues that new technologies separate the world's population into two forces: *the human capital elite* that easily uses new technologies and *the productive force of the growing mass of workers*, with little hope of finding meaningful jobs in the new global economy. These millions of workers are growing more intensely, becoming victims of growing stress in a context of ultra-technical and ultra-technological work.

8. Conclusions

Team management is an art that requires knowledge, skills on how to manage different talents while bringing them together successfully. As a successful team manager, we should understand team dynamics right from start to finish. In this sense, a well-composed team would be manageable by delegating responsibilities following the skills of team members.

A well-managed team should meet its obligations, responsibilities and objectives within a specified time period. The success of such a team depends on how professional, informed and persuasive a team manager is.

So the team has a key role, influencing the performance of the group, but also the individual, the achievement of the objectives, the working climate, the stability of the employees and the reputation of the organization.

The VUCA environment, in fact, helps dedicated leaders to set the necessary goals for the organization, thus, through managerial analysis, to convey to the team the targets to be achieved for performing results.

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