Team Management : Simplifying from a Child's Perspective

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Abstract

The success of an organization depends on how well the managers are able to pair and relate individual goals of the employees to the overall organizational goal. So, the victory of an organization basically rests on how well the employees or team of workers are managed, led and motivated. However, as it is more easily said than done, managing groups or team of employees is the most challenging and complicated process or task than anything else in an organization. In the globalized scenario, where the organizations are operating in an open and global environment across the world, the process of team management has become even more challenging and complicated with people from very diverse backgrounds and races. Their cultural and social background commonly called as socio-cultural base or origin has taken the challenge of managing teams effectively and efficiently to a much higher level or degree. The aim of this conceptual work is to understand the present or existing literature on team management, relate the process of team work or management to children through logical progression and develop an easily perceivable model which can be applied to any corner of the globe while managing teams.

Keywords: Team, Socio-cultural base, Sourcing

Introduction

Management, as we all know, is predominantly about managing human efforts. The collective effort of human beings in an organization decides its success or failure. In other words, group effort or team work leads to achievement of organizational goals and objectives. The success of an organization depends on how well the managers are able to pair and relate individual goals of the employees to the overall organizational goal. So, the victory of an organization basically rests on how well the employees or team of workers are managed, led and motivated. However, as it is easily said than done, managing groups or team of employees is the most challenging and complicated process or task than anything else in an organization.

In the globalized scenario, where the organizations are operating in an open and global environment across the world, the process of team management has become even more challenging and complicated with people from very diverse backgrounds and races. Their cultural and social background, commonly called as socio-cultural base or origin, has taken the challenge of managing teams effectively and efficiently to a much higher level.

On one hand, where the corporations are reaping rich benefits of operating in a global environment in terms of sourcing raw materials, human resource and capital, on the other hand, it is increasingly becoming difficult to manage teams or groups in such a diverse and dynamic environment. The dynamics of human resource or teams in an organization is changing every now and then and

thus, it is difficult to devise any strategy based on available literature.

Practically, the managers are expected to be equipped with a high level of human handling or managing capacity as we are in an era of thought leadership and transformational leadership. The managers today are trained in a simulated or real global environment so that they can adapt to any culture and situation in any country or area in the globe. But, despite all these, the concern for managing teams in multinational corporations are found to be critical and a matter of further research and exploration to develop ways and means.

Aim of the work

The aim of this conceptual work is to understand the existing literature on team management, relate the process of team work or management to children through logical progression and develop an easily perceivable model which can be applied to any corner of the globe while managing teams.

Background of the work

The origin of team management theories can probably be associated with authors such as Douglas McGregor, Abraham Maslow, Frederick Herzberg and many others, if not directly then indirectly. Douglas McGregor in his Theory X and Theory Y suggested two different views of individuals: one of which is negative, called as Theory X

and the other is positive, so called as Theory Y. According to McGregor, the perception of managers on the nature of individuals is based on various assumptions.

Theory X assumes that an average employee intrinsically does not like work and tries to escape it whenever possible. Since the employee does not want to work, he must be persuaded, compelled, or warned with punishment so as to achieve organizational goals. A close supervision is required on the part of the managers. Many employees rank job security on top, and they have little or no aspiration/ ambition. Employees generally dislike responsibilities and are resistant to change. On the other hand, Theory Y assumes that employees can perceive their job as relaxing and normal. They exercise their physical and mental efforts in an inherent manner in their jobs. They may not require only threat, external control and coercion to work, but they can use self-direction and self-control if they are dedicated and sincere to achieve the organizational objectives. An average employee can learn to admit and recognize the responsibility. The employees have skills and capabilities. Their logical capabilities should be fully utilized. In other words, the creativity, resourcefulness and innovative potentiality of the employees can be utilized to solve organizational problems (managementstudyguide.com)[1]. However, the complexities in the nature and attitude of a mature person did not receive enough attention in this theory. So, the question, "How to handle a group of people with varied backgrounds, nature, attitude and culture?" remained unanswered.In today's scenario Theory X has become obsolete because of open system of management followed by most of the companies. Employees are treated as valuable resource, especially in service centric corporations which dominate or contributes a major portion of gross domestic product (GDP) of most of the developed and developing countries. Abraham Maslow's need hierarchy theory was a significant contributor in this regard. This says that people who are supposed to work in teams usually falls into various levels of needs according to their status. This creates a difference in their motivation. As a matter of fact, referring to Maslow's need hierarchy theory, the process of team management becomes even more complicated with group members at different stages of needs. Frederick Herzberg, in his book, *"The Motivation to Work"*, which was published in the year 1959 attempted to study the factors in an employee's work place which causes satisfaction or dissatisfaction. He found that the factors which cause job satisfaction were different from those which cause job dissatisfaction. Accordingly, he termed the motivating factors as *'motivators'* and the dissatisfying factors as *'hygiene factors'*. He further suggested that every organization should try to provide not only for the hygiene factors but also for the motivators. However, in this case also, the question of making a group of employees with varied backgrounds, attitude and nature work together smoothly towards a specific goal remained unanswered as, in today's scenario, the common factors are not considered to be very effective in motivating a complex set of minds with distinct or blur egos, sentiments and attitudes. Motivated by Abraham Maslow's need hierarchy theory, David McClelland in early 1960's came up with 'Human motivation theory' also known as 'Learned need theory'. He identified three basic and important motivators in human beings regardless of gender, age or culture which in turn depend on our culture and life experience. The three basic motivators are **achievement, affiliation,** and **power.** Further, the dominant motivator will decide the characteristic patterns. So, depending upon the dominant motivator, characteristics of individuals will vary. For example, achievement oriented people usually like to work alone whereas affiliation oriented people would like to work in groups. Hence, the responsibility of a manager is to identify the dominant motivators in each individual in his team and assign them type of work depending on that.However, since the needs are learned, as mentioned by McClelland, they may change over a period of time depending on the experience of the individual. Also, the theory does not work out when the team or group is bigger in size with more number of members, as it would be practically not possible to identify and work on dominant motivator of each individual of the team or group.Teresa Amabile and Steven Kramer in their book *"The Progress Principle" said* that people in a work place get motivated by taking progressive steps towards success. The steps may be even small, which makes them more creative and productive, keeps them engaged in a positive fashion and helps in developing better relationships. Eventually, this leads to better work performance. In short, achieving and recognizing regular "small wins" helps people have rich, engaged, and productive work lives. As any experienced manager knows, happy, engaged, and productive team members can achieve far more than unhappy team members (mindtools.com)[2].

However, this theory also failed to focus on the diversity in team members and the ways and means to bridge those gaps and convert them into a common homogenous group with similar attitude and drive.

Learning team behavior from children

The three most important factors for any team to succeed in its venture are *clear and understandable communication, uniform motivated effort or energy of the members* and *high degree of coordination.* In order to achieve these factors, each and every individual member of the team should have the same psychological drives. However, practically, it would be next to impossible, if not impossible, to attain such homogeneity in drives. But, a careful observation of children's behavior playing in a group or together draws attention towards the fact that these three factors may not be unachievable also. A detailed observation and analysis of child behavior gives us an idea of well coordinated team work.**(Endnotes)**
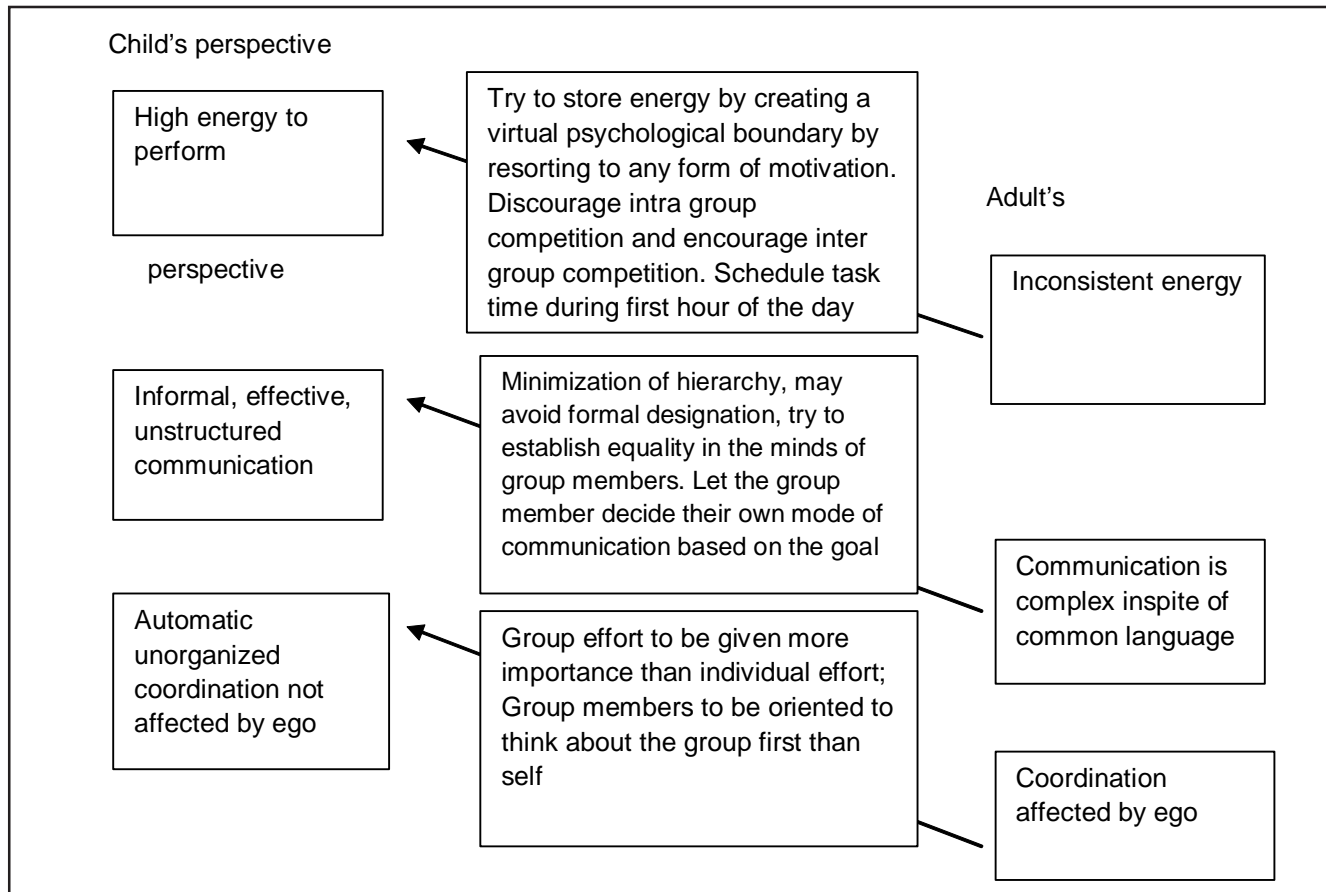
Fig. 1: Factors deciding team success
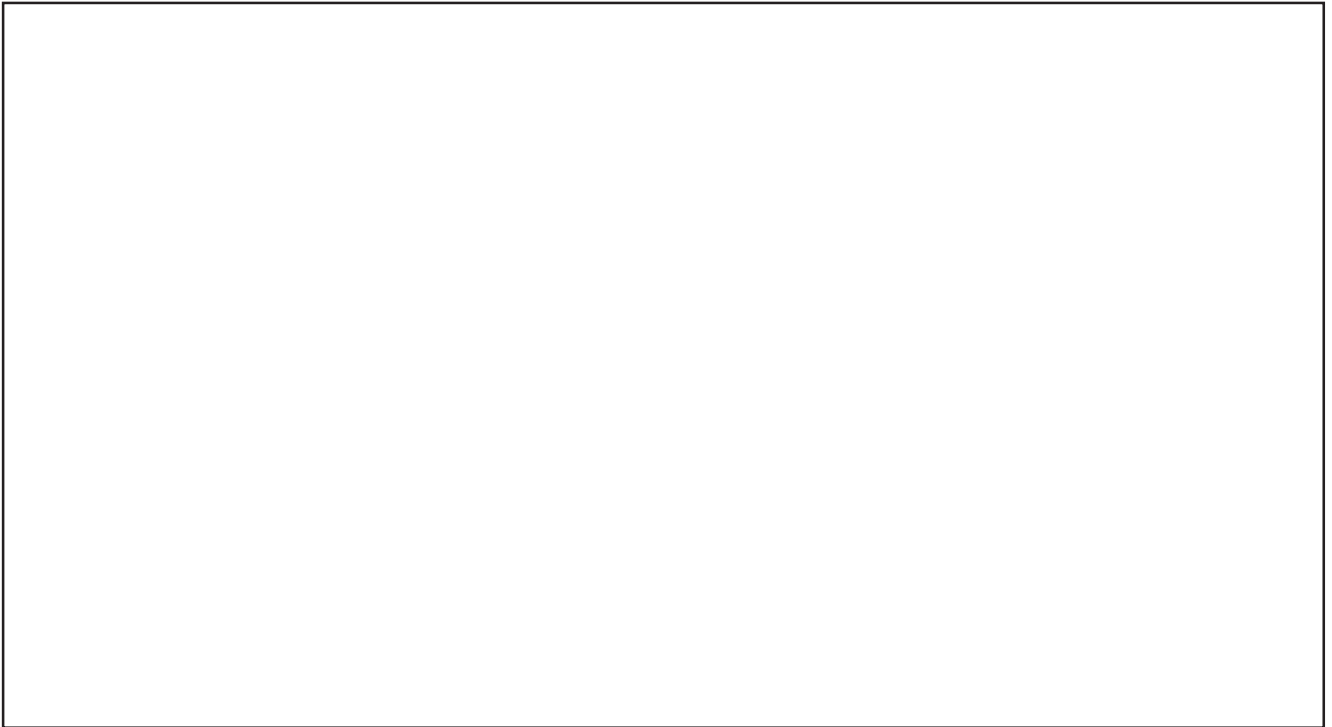
Very often it is observed that a group of children playing together develops certain informal and uniform code of communication irrespective of the language that they speak. This phenomenon is usually observed among children below 3 years of age who even cannot speak properly. However, they develop a harmonious behavior while playing in groups. This poses a question in our mind that how do few individuals (children in this case) succeed in coordinated activity even without any formal language of communication. This is largely because of the fact that factors like ego and super ego are not dominant in children which leads to complicated human behavior. Also, human beings prefer to stay in groups as in the case of some wild animals which also gives them a sense of security. But, with increase in age, people become more individualistic.

Most of us would agree on the fact that children have high energy to perform any function or task. This is because of the fact that their execution of energy is unidirectional. They are capable of storing the energy and releasing it during the task. However, when we grow up, our energy gets shared by many activities, physically and mentally. This has always posed a great challenge in front of manager: how and to what extent such energy can be stored and released only during the task?

These questions can be answered by bridging the gap between a child's way of looking into a team work and adult's way. An attempt to bridge this gap is shown in a pictorial format below:

In order to transform the inconsistency in energy among adults while performing in a team into higher consistent energy, managers should try to create a virtual psychological boundary by resorting to any form of motivation they think right. Discouraging intra group competition among team members would tie them together into a common unit or body. However, in this case managers need to keep an eye on the homogeneity in performance among the group members so that each and every member puts his/ her 100% effort and strength in the task. It is always better to schedule the task time or performance time during the first half of the day, as the energy to perform is generally higher among the individuals. Though we all speak about balancing professional and personal life but, we also know how difficult it is practically. Managers should try to understand and counsel the team members not only on his own but, also encourage the members to share their problems and come out with some solutions among themselves. These kinds of sessions can be scheduled at the end of the day and can be termed as 'open informal session'. This would bring a positive sense of association among the members and will also act as a motivator. Some may perceive this type of activity as unproductive. However, if we look other way round, this type of activity would rather act as a catalyst in the team performance.

Exihibit 1 : Bridging the gap

Child's perspective

| High energy to perform | ← | Try to store energy by creating a virtual psychological boundary by resorting to any form of motivation. Discourage intra group competition and encourage inter group competition. Schedule task time during first hour of the day |

Adult's

perspective

Inconsistent energy

| Informal, effective, unstructured communication | ← | Minimization of hierarchy, may avoid formal designation, try to establish equality in the minds of group members. Let the group member decide their own mode of communication based on the goal |

Communication is complex inspite of common language

| Automatic unorganized coordination not affected by ego | ← | Group effort to be given more importance than individual effort; Group members to be oriented to think about the group first than self |

Coordination affected by ego

Communication has always been a problem in team performance and management. Inspite of plethora of literature available in making communication effective, the difference in thought process, other psychological and environmental factors of the sender and receiver poses a challenge in the process till today. The question is not about a common language of communication but, the way it is perceived. The major barrier in smooth communication is organizational hierarchy, as pointed out by many authors from time to time. A flat organization structure would surely act towards making communication more effective. Avoiding formal designations within a team (senior, junior etc.) may help in dealing with the psychological barrier that creates distance among team members. This may help in bringing a sense of equality among team members. Freedom of communicating in the manner one desires may also help significantly in making the process of communication easy. Instead of giving importance to the mode or formal code of communication, focus should be more on the end result i.e. whether the subject matter has been perceived in the way it should be.

Coordination, being one of the most important factors in team management, has been found to be very difficult to achieve. Various psychological factors have always influenced the process of coordination. Again, this particular factor largely depends on the previous two factors, namely, strength and communication. The achievement of a high degree of coordination depends on effective communication and strength to perform. The root of improper coordination lies with the fact that human being become more individualistic as they grow older. So, the team members should be oriented in such a manner that they think about the team first than themselves. This can be achieved by formally giving high importance to the team achievement than individual success. This would enforce a sense of strong team work among the members. Managers should give more freedom to the members and act as an observer.

The gist of the entire work is that a mature team with high strength of performance and free informal and effective communication would make a better team.

Conclusion

Effective management of team has always been a serious concern for managers. In today's business world, where the diversity in human resource has increased manifold because of globalization, team management has become a serious challenge for the leaders. However, a keen observation of the group behavior of children gives us an idea of effectively dealing with complex group dynamics of adults and managing team performance in a much better way.

References

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