

THE BEST LEADERSHIP STYLE FOR SELF-MANAGED TEAMS

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ABSTRACT

The key processes (motivational, cognitive and social) are influenced by the type of leadership process that emerges within self-managed teams in an organization. Exploring the relationship between organizational leadership styles applied to self-managed teams (SMTs) and its effectiveness, educators and industry can better understand the type of leadership roles necessary for achieving a highly effective team. New approaches are required to deal with the increasing interdependence, complexity, and uncertainty in the environments of these organizations. Utilizing self-organizing teams will also require a complete shift from existing processes that impact employee motivation, compensation and evaluation. SMTs have the autonomy to make important decisions concerning their team processes. They present perhaps the most visible modification to the traditional bureaucratic work organization. Through implementing self-directed teams, organizations are challenging the hierarchical and functional divisions of the bureaucratic workplace, decentralizing decision-making, and creating and maintaining work units that involve a diverse group of employees. SMTs are praised for bringing about results such as increased productivity, accelerated new product development and process improvements, increased worker participation and decreased hierarchy. Relative to teams that relied on leader emergence, teams that rotated leadership among members had higher levels of voice, cooperation, and performance. Overall, results of the study demonstrate the potential importance of team-design decisions in self-managed teams.

KEYWORDS: Organizational Leadership, Self-Managed Teams, Teams, Decision-Making

INTRODUCTION

An organization is a group for which there are assigned role functions, usually limited life span membership, and a conscious awareness of interdependency. The key processes (motivational, cognitive and social) are influenced by the type of leadership process that emerges within self-managed teams (SMTs) in an organization. Organizational motivation is a critical team process, because without it, SMTs are not going to put forth the necessary effort to complete tasks. Whereas organizational socialization is a critical team process because teams need to be cohesive to perform well and be committed to the team's objectives. Moreover, organizational cognition is a critical team process as well because it represents the acquisition, storage, manipulation, and use of information within teams in an organization. A number of labels exist for the concept of SMTs. Terms such as semi-autonomous workgroups, on the one hand, appear to imply more freedom than the team actually has and might give the impression that management has no control over the team at all. The mere term 'true team', on the other hand, also does not qualify because this is too general in nature. SMTs consider to be concise enough. A SMT is defined as:

- A permanent group of employees who work together on a daily basis, who, as a team, share the responsibility of an organization for all interdependent activities necessary to deliver a well-defined product or service to an internal or external customer.
- The team is, to a certain degree, responsible for managing itself and the tasks the organization performs, on the basis of a clear common purpose.
- In order to do so, the team has access to relevant information, possesses relevant competences and other resources, and has the authority to independently make decisions with regard to the work process (e.g., solving problems).

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COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW OF THE SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

An organization is a unit of teams comprising of interdependent individuals with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose and set of performance goals and to common expectations for which they hold themselves accountable (Lussier & Achua, 2010). Modern organizations in U.S. face numerous problems, such as decreasing quantity and quality of production, worker dissatisfaction, high levels of turnover and absenteeism, and counterproductive employee behavior. New approaches are required to deal with the increasing interdependence, complexity, and uncertainty in the environments of these organizations. Utilizing self-organizing teams will also require a complete shift from existing processes that impact employee motivation, compensation and evaluation.

One approach to meet these challenges is the use of SMTs. SMTs are relatively autonomous teams whose members share or rotate leadership responsibilities and hold themselves mutually responsible for a set of performance goals assigned by higher management (Lussier & Achua, 2010). SMTs have the autonomy to make important decisions concerning their team processes. They present perhaps the most visible modification to the traditional bureaucratic work organization. Since leadership is not designated in SMTs, what do leadership processes look like in these types of teams? Often work teams are allowed to self-manage their team processes and the team has the authority and responsibility to manage their team functions and additionally SMTs have no formal leader designated by the authority that creates the team. Rather, the team is allowed to designate its own leader.

Individuals in SMTs have much of the responsibility and authority to make important decisions turned over to them. SMTs are given the power to make decisions, set goals, assign work, and determine schedules, and so on. However, the necessity of leadership processes does not disappear because a team is self-managed (Solansky, 2008). As the teams are self-managed, the instructor does not assign roles, set goals or provide suggestions about how the team should manage itself, communicate, or interact. Each team has complete autonomy in establishing how and to what extent it has to meet its goals.

In an organization, the behavior of a self-management leader demonstrates significant differences except “encourages rehearsal” (Manz & Sims, 1987). The direction of these differences indicates that coordinators were perceived to be significantly higher on encouraging self-management than the team leaders. Through implementing self-directed

teams, organizations are challenging the hierarchical and functional divisions of the bureaucratic workplace, decentralizing decision-making, and creating and maintaining work units that involve a diverse group of employees.

The way in which SMTs are implemented in an organization and its most important common design principles are (Tjepkema, 2003):

- A complete team task;
- The team can fulfill the task as autonomously as possible;
- Team members' tasks are interdependent;
- The team is neither too large, nor too small (7-12 members);
- Team members are multi-skilled;
- The team has a coordinator;
- Supportive production, control, support and information systems are in place; and
- Rewards are linked to team performance.

Sharing information is crucial in SMTs. Sharing information openly results in common goals or vision, employee empowerment and rewards & recognition (Mathur, 2009).

SMTs are praised for bringing about results such as increased productivity, accelerated new product development and process improvements, increased worker participation and decreased hierarchy.

Relative to teams that relied on leader emergence, teams that rotated leadership among members had higher levels of voice, cooperation, and performance. Overall, results of the study demonstrate the potential importance of team-design decisions in SMTs (Erez, 2002).

PERSONAL VIEW OF THE SCHOLARLY LITERATURE

SMTs go by many different names: self-directed, self-leading, self-maintaining, and self-regulating teams. To effectively and efficiently address the challenges that currently international or overseas companies are facing organizations are rethinking the way work is done. Old concepts of hierarchical leadership, centralized decision-making, functional specialization, and individualized reward systems are being replaced with new, more flexible and adaptive structures. The use of teams has become the competitive weapon of choice for many business and non-business organizations, with many of these companies opting for a new form of performing work called the SMT (Lussier & Achua, 2010).

As per all the scholarly reviewed literatures, we believe that SMTs give workers a voice in making decisions about the design of work as well as greater autonomy and discretion in the structure of their work and members operate without direct managerial supervision as well. It is important that self-direction be viewed not as a destination but as a process. The teams do not start out totally self-directed, nor do they ever totally get there. There is always something new for them to learn, a new responsibility for them to assume. SMTs are autonomous within limits; they have freedom to operate within a specified domain and are bound by explicit rules and performance objectives. It is important that SMTs

not only need to consider the team goals but also need to have an overview of the link with organizational goals. When commitment to team goals and performance becomes too great, groupthink may occur. This has a couple negative effects:

- **Conformism:** Team members tend to conform to the group norm rather than stand out with new ideas or different opinions which lead to a decrease of the team's capacity for innovation. The group responds less adequately to changes and tends to behave as a closed system.
- A reduced ability to establish team performance objectively and critically.

In order to prevent this from occurring it is desirable to create commitment of team members not only to team objectives and performance but also to the performance and objectives of the organization as a whole.

Self-managed teams are progressing from what's working well to what isn't. Team members have an opportunity to help get better at developing solutions. As much as possibly can delegate the development of solutions and periodic review of progress as a means of helping team members to maintain their accountability. Whenever people don't know what to do team members need to show and coach them but seldom volunteer solutions, too. Whenever a team needs to become self-managing, the team members need to take responsibility for addressing issues and making their solutions work.

Leadership in organizations is an area that merits more attention because its potential impact on team functioning is key. It is a process of intentional influence by one person over others "to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization". Organizational leadership represents teams whose members are empowered to share the tasks and responsibilities of leadership. SMT is a shared process where "important decisions about what to do and how to do it are made through the use of an interactive process that involves many different people who influence each other, not by a single person".

PERSONAL EXPERIENCE WITH SMTS

Our experience with SMTs was during our undergraduate and graduate education. Everyone would have experienced group projects during the college days. We had worked on several group projects each semester of graduation days and all our projects ran pretty smoothly without major roadblocks. Of all these projects that we had worked on, we remember one project and would like to share our experience of the same. This project was when we were doing a project in our undergraduate titled "Proximity Sensors" and it was for our project thesis. We were a team of three and during our whole project we shared the project work. One person took care of assembly and install, one person on hardware part and the other one in debugging the issues. We used to meet at the campus library during weekends and had conversations or discussions on how to proceed with the assembly and other hardware details. We never missed any meetings and everyone was so cooperative in the team though we were not from the same cultural or ethnical background.

On our final presentation day, our motor capacity of the sensor that we had developed didn't have enough power or capacity to move forward though the battery was running. After many trials at least we were able to present the proximity sensor to some extent of our class and everyone in the class were so excited to see our model and appreciated our work. Though we couldn't present a complete model and we lost some points to that, even then none of us were disheartened. We were motivated and appreciated each other's work which was much needed indeed. It was a good

learning experience for us and we realized that team, innovative ideas and satisfaction are more important than grades or appraisals.

SUMMARY

The research on organizational leadership through SMTs is a phenomenon worth researching, not only because of what it might reveal about leadership but also what it might reveal about its team function. The traditional approach to leadership essentially sees the leader as a focal point, a central processing node where responsibility ultimately resides. The center focus of a single leader helps clarify role boundaries, procedures, and hierarchical arrangements. The center focus of the leader provides a singular source for defining direction and enabling climate, motivation, and identity. Shared leadership does not guarantee a work team's success. Sharing leadership makes the team environment more complex, and so the team's ability to communicate becomes more important than if a single individual was the leader. But, a single leader, no matter how gifted, cannot be right all the time, so as a practical matter, combining the talents and interests of several individuals likely increases a work team's long-term success simply because greater resources are being devoted to the leadership function in the organization.

Clearly SMTs need to be researched and observed in wider contexts, in order to think about some of the questions: What kinds of roles are shared, what mechanism allows a team to manage the shared roles, and how does the team maintain a decentralized order without tipping into confusion?

RESEARCH IMPORTANCE

This research on organizational leadership in implementing SMTs is important to an operational leader in an organization and can be related to the following organizational performances (Tjepkema, 2003):

- **Quality of Organization:** The motive related to the quality of organization, such as a need for quality improvement, cost price reduction, increased customer focus, or higher levels of service and greater productivity.
- **Quality of Working Life:** The need to increase the quality of working life is an argument which plays a role in the background, but which cannot be regarded independently from the need to increase the quality of organization.
- **Quality of Working Relations:** The desire to increase the quality of working relations seems to play hardly any role.

It is proved and accepted that SMTs have positive effects on both business related objectives and on the quality of working life. There are reasons to assume that using SMTs as a basic building block of the organization can help to overcome several of the hardware related barriers, most notably:

- Organizational design founded on assumption of a stable environment
- Strict demarcation of functions and departments
- Hands-on management

- The difficulty of learning from experience

Other barriers, such as a lack of resources and difficulties of management teams, appear not to be affected directly.

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