

# The Relevance of Team Leadership in Promoting Efficiency of Organisations

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**Abstract:** This present paper discusses the relevance of team leadership in the promotion of efficiency in organisations. Team leadership is the style which would yield the best results in today's organisations. Team leadership emphasises both task and interpersonal relationships and can create a very productive and good working environment. It is a fact that most employees want to be valued, heard and safe while getting the job done. A disgruntled employee is an employee that will not give their best effort and could have an influence on others. Experience reveals that the worst thing that a manager can do is to ignore interpersonal relationships and focus solely on tasks. When focusing on tasks, the one thing that is easily over looked is safety. However, if management takes time to communicate with employees, safety problems can be avoided and new improved approaches to production be discovered. The manager or supervisor can focus on the tasks; interpersonal relationships, discuss safety concerns, and also explore improved ways of performing tasks. Team leadership is a leadership style that will allow the employee to be heard and valued while focusing on production and getting the task done.

**Keywords:** Relevance, team, efficiency, organisation, leadership, promote

## INTRODUCTION

Leadership in organisational groups or work teams has become one of the most popular and rapidly growing areas of leadership theory and research. Teams are organisational groups composed of members who are interdependent, who share common goals, and who must coordinate their activities to accomplish these goals. Examples of such groups include project management teams, task forces, work units, standing committees, quality teams, and improvement teams.

Reviews of the historical roots of group or team research provide a clear explanation of the long and diverse study of human groups [1, 2]. Porter and Beyerlein [2] indicate that the study of groups actually began in the 1920s and 1930s with the focus of the human relations movement on collaborative efforts at work, as opposed to the individual efforts previously advocated by scientific management theorists. In the 1940s the focus shifted to the study of group dynamics and the development of social science theory. In the 1950s the focus moved to sensitivity training and T-groups and the role of leadership in these groups. Much of this early research was based on laboratory studies of experimental groups or field research on real-life groups for short periods of time, ignoring the contexts in which the groups were embedded [1].

In the 1960s and 1970s the era of organisational development focused on developing team and leadership effectiveness through interventions in ongoing work teams. In the 1980s competition from Japan and other countries encouraged the focus on quality teams, benchmarking, and continuous improvement. In the 1990s the focus on organisational teams, while still focusing on quality, shifted to a global perspective focusing on organisational strategies for

maintaining a competitive advantage. Organisations have faster response capability because of their flatter organisational structures, which relies on teams and new technology to enable communication across time and space [2]. Mankin, Cohen and Bikson [3] refer to this new organisation as being "team-based, technology-enabled". The organisational team-based structure is an important way to remain competitive by responding quickly and adapting to constant and rapid changes.

Much research has focused on the problems confronting organisational work teams and on ways to make them more effective [4]. Research on the effective of organisational teams has suggested that the use of teams has led to greater productivity, more effective use of resources, better decisions and problem solving, better-quality products and services, and greater innovation and creativity [5]. The failures of teams have also been very dramatic and visible.

In a recent review of team research, Ilgen, Hollenbeck, Johnson and Jundt [6] suggest that studies since 1996 have become more complex, focusing on more team variables and no longer focusing exclusively on the outcome of team performance. Current research is also investigating the role of affective, behavioural and cognitive processes in team success and viability. The role and impact of mediating processes such as trusting, bonding, planning, adapting, structuring and learning are also being studied in terms of team performance and viability (2005).

Studies also suggest that it is essential to understand the role of leadership within teams to ensure team success and to avoid team failure. "Indeed, we

would argue that effective leadership processes represent perhaps the most critical factor in the success of organisational teams" [7]. Conversely, ineffective leadership often is seen as the primary reason teams fail [8]. To ensure team success, we need to focus on and understand the necessary functions of leadership. It is important to note that these functions can be performed by the formal team leader and / or shared by team members. Day, Gronn and Salas [9] refer to this shared or distributed leadership as team leadership capacity, encompassing the leadership repertoire of the entire team.

### **Team Leadership Model**

The team leadership model proposed in this paper places leadership in the driver's seat of team effectiveness. The model provides a mental road map to help the leader (or any team member who is providing leadership) diagnose team problems and take appropriate action to correct these problems.

Effective team performance begins with the leader's mental model of the situation. This mental model reflects not only the components of the problem confronting the team but also the environmental and organisational contingencies that define the larger context of team action. The leader develops a model of what the team problem is and what solutions are possible in this context, given the environmental and organisational constraints and resources [10].

To respond appropriately to the problem envisioned in the mental model, a good leader needs to be behaviourally flexible and have a wide repertoire of actions or skills to meet the team's diverse needs [11]. When the leader's behaviour matches the complexity of the situation, he or she is behaving with "requisite variety", or the set of behaviours necessary to meet the group's needs [12]. Effective teams leaders are able to construct accurate mental models of the team's problems by observing team functioning and can also take requisite action to solve these problems.

The leader has special responsibility for functioning in a manner that will help the group achieve effectiveness. Within this perspective, leadership behaviour is seen as team-based problem solving, in which the leader attempts to achieve team goals by analysing the internal and external situation and then selecting and implementing the appropriate behaviours to ensure team effectiveness [13]. In addition, Zaccaro *et al.* [10] indicate that leaders must use discretion about which problems need intervention and make choices about which solutions are the most appropriate. The appropriate solution varies by circumstance and focuses on what should be done to make the team more effective. Effective leaders have the ability to determine what leadership interventions are needed, if any, to solve team problems.

### **How Does the Team Leadership Model Work?**

Leaders can use the model to help them make decisions about the current state of their team and the specific actions they need to take, if any, to improve the team's functioning. The model portrays leadership as a team oversight function in which the leader's role is to do whatever is necessary to help the group achieve effectiveness. The model provides the leader with a cognitive map identifying group needs and offers suggestions about how to take appropriate corrective actions. The model helps the leader make sense of the complexity of groups and offers practical suggestions based on theory and research.

In using the model, the team leader engages in the leader mediation process by deciding whether monitoring reveals that all aspects of the team's functioning are satisfactory, then the leader should not take any direct actions but continue to monitor the internal and external environments in terms of team performance and development. If monitoring reveals that action is needed, then the leader decides at which level or levels an action is needed (internal or external). Finally, the leader decides which action is appropriate to meet the needs of the team.

Determining the exact intervention is not as easy as it sounds, however, and it clearly reflects the skills necessary for team leadership. For example, a leader monitoring the internal functioning of the team notices in fighting for control and power. The leader might see this as an internal relationship problem because of the authoritarian and autocratic behaviour of one group member. Or perhaps the leader might see it as an internal task problem because the structure of the team is not appropriate and the roles and responsibilities of some group members are unclear. Or perhaps the leader sees the problem as an external environmental problem because the team is not given sufficient autonomy from the organisation, and consequently the members are fighting over what little power and control exist. In any case, the leader can decide to keep monitoring the situation and not take any immediate action. Or the leader can decide at which level to intervene and then decide to enact the most appropriate leadership function at that level. The leader might decide to intervene at all three levels, addressing the authoritarian individual (internal, relational), clarifying group roles (internal, task and negotiating more team autonomy with those higher up in the organisation (external).

The team leadership model helps to point the way for constant team analysis and improvement, much like that of sports teams. In sports, the coach does not stop working just because the team is winning. The coach keeps working to build commitment, develop young players, share expertise, create new methods and strategies, and generally improve team functioning. The effective coach never rests on past success but works to

improve the team's functioning for the future. Organisational team leaders could learn a great deal from sports team coaches. The team leadership model helps point the way for such constant analysis and improvement. By comparing their own teams with established standards or criteria of team excellence, leaders can determine the areas of greatest weaknesses that might need critical intervention.

### **Strengths**

One of the strengths of this model is that it is designed to answer many of the questions not answered in earlier small-group research by focusing on the real-life organisational work group and the leadership needed therein. The model places the ongoing work group or team in an environmental context within the organisation, industry, or society. In addition, the real-life focus on performance and team effectiveness enables leaders and members to diagnose and correct team problems. By learning what constitutes excellent teams and applying these criteria to team performance, leaders can better learn how to lead teams to the highest levels of excellence.

A second strength of the model is that it provides a cognitive guide that helps leaders design and maintains effective teams, especially when performance is below standards. Such an approach is consistent with the emerging theoretical notions of leader as a medium whose job it is to process the complex information inherent in teamwork. "Leadership is a complex process; complexity of actions is thus identifiable as leadership" [14]. Any model or theory that tries to simplify such a complex process would be inappropriate and inadequate. The team leadership approach is not simplistic, and it integrates in a manageable and practical form many complex factors that can help a leader be a good medium or processor of information.

Strength of the model is that it takes into account the changing role of leaders and followers in organisations. The model does not focus on the position power of a leader but instead focuses on the critical functions of leadership as diagnosis and action taking. Any team member can perform the critical leadership functions to assess the current effectiveness of the team and then take appropriate action. This approach is consistent with the current movement in organisations to rethink leadership responsibilities in work groups. The responsibilities or functions of team leadership, such as setting goals, coaching and rewarding, historically have rested with the group's formal leader, but now with organisational restructuring these duties and responsibilities often are distributed across the team.

### **Weaknesses**

One of the weaknesses of the present approach is that the model is not completely supported or tested.

The applied focus on team effectiveness and the organisational work group is a new approach to studying teams. Much of the earlier research on small groups did not directly apply to real-life organisational teams. Many questions remain to be answered regarding team patterns over time, self-fulfilling group cycles, authority issues, and content issues [15]. Do these theoretical relationships hold true in new groups, mature groups, and deteriorating groups? Do these theoretical notions hold true across all types of teams, especially for virtual teams? Research also should focus more on organisational rewards. How can leaders reinforce values and behaviours that will perpetuate the functioning of the team rather than reward the individual members of the team [16]. Clearly, new systems are needed for team-based organisations. No other change will send as powerful a message to employees that the organisation values teamwork' [3].

Although one of the strengths of this model is that it takes into account the complex nature of team leadership, this very complexity is also one of this approach's greatest weaknesses. The model is complex and does not provide easy answers to difficult decisions for the leader. With so much distributed and shared leadership in organisations today, such a complex approach to leadership might not be practical for the growing number of team leaders.

In addition to being highly complex, this theoretical approach does not offer on the spot answers to specific situations for the team leader. What should the leader say to a team member who is crying? How do you deal with team members who are screaming at each other? What do you do when the organisation refuses to reward team performance? The team leadership model does not provide much guidance in everyday interactions and complications of team management. The model assumes that the leader knows about group processes and decision making, interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, networking and so on. The model should be expanded to identify specific skills and interventions that could help the group deal with the more critical incidents that arise on a daily basis.

Finally, the fact that the team leadership model suggests new and creative directions for leadership training could be construed as strength. However, these directions for leadership training are vague, complex and somewhat overwhelming. The long list of team leadership skills makes it very difficult to know where to start. This is compounded by the fact that many teams are empowered and self-directed, necessitating that these skills be taught to everyone who serves in the role of team leader at some point. The roles of leaders and followers can change over time in a planned organisational restructuring or can even change in the course of a day, making it very important for the leader to understand the follower roles and vice versa. More

focus is needed on how to teach team diagnosis and action taking so that such leadership skills can be implemented easily at all levels of the organisation.

## CONCLUSIONS

There are many ways to apply the team leadership model to increase the effectiveness of organisational teams. The model is useful in helping the leader make decisions: Should I act? If so, how should I intervene? For example, if the group is not performing effectively (team effectiveness), then the leader can make the first strategic choice by monitoring the situation or acting to improve team functioning. If an action seems warranted, then the leader needs to decide whether the action should be directed inward toward team functioning, outward toward the environment, or both. Once the context the environment or both. Once the context for the action is determined, then the leader needs to choose from his or her repertoire the most appropriate skill for the situation. Team management is the ability of a leader, manager or supervisors to administer and coordinate a group of individuals to perform a task. Team management involves teamwork, communication, objective wetting and performance appraisals. Moreover, team management is the capability to identify problems and resolve conflict within a team.

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