



TenStep Supplemental Paper

10 September 2010

Corporate Rupture

Teamwork has a definite advantage over working independently. Teams are more likely to produce effective and innovative strategies than a single mind can. However, teamwork is not always a bed of roses. Inherent barriers and loopholes often render it ineffective.

With organizations increasingly seeking ways to tap team potential, the challenge of circumventing the inherent institutional barriers is most urgent. Among the host of challenges, rewards and incentives management, factionism, groupism and unhealthy competition between team members are issues that need to be addressed. These issues are unavoidable since they symbolize the human factor in organizational working. Nevertheless, organizations need a balancing act to leverage the advantages of cross-functional teams while abating the hurt and conflicts emerging from teamwork.

Experts in organizational behavior believe that the one best way to excite people into teamwork is to periodically offer them irresistible challenges - for instance, throwing stretched targets in restricted time frames, or setting process-improvement objectives, or providing an opportunity to be seen as aggressive winners are strategies that could seduce employees to work as a team. Working against time to achieve aggressive deadlines leaves little room for misunderstandings and internal conflicts. Team members are far too focused on achieving the objectives to resort to nitpicking.

The philosophy of providing employees with irresistible challenges has its roots in the belief that human beings yearn to be a part of a purpose that is much larger than them. The need to be a part of a larger objective is an important human desire that if fulfilled can fuel a person's drive towards the pre-determined objectives. However, finding a purpose with profound meaning and inspiring employees to accept it calls for great courage and hard work. Team leaders and managers have to define the right challenge for their teams. Mismatched objectives yield little or no returns, dampening the entire exercise and purpose of teaming individuals.

Team tactics

Inform and communicate

A well-informed team delivers better than a poorly-informed team. Providing work teams with relevant corporate information is critical to their success. Employees have to be informed about the threats and challenges that the company envisages and its plans to counter them. Keeping employees informed helps win their confidence and arouse a feeling of belongingness. They learn to take the initiative in any given situation. Managers must thus open their business closets to enable employees to view the business strategy from a much wider perspective. A transparent and open system of communication also ensures that employees understand the company's objectives and the right way of attaining them.



TenStep Supplemental Paper

Set the right direction

Guidance at the right time of the right people can steer the course of teamwork. Managers thus need to time their advice in the teambuilding process. Providing team members the right guidance when it is required most is critical to team success. In addition to guidance, managers must encourage employees to contribute ideas and innovative strategies that could help attain pre-determined objectives. However, managers should refrain from micromanaging and provide freedom of expression to employees since micromanaging dampens the spirit of innovation and creativity.

Testing limits

Managers should ensure that the team objectives are challenging enough to test employee potential without being unreasonably tough. Stretching employee skills to achieve objectives is an effective method of keeping employees motivated and focused. Managers also should ensure that the skills being tested are different from what employees use in their routine activities. Testing a different set of skills every time engages employees for a longer duration and prevents boredom or monotony from creeping in.

Make it fun

To accelerate workplace performance, it's important to infuse an element of fun. Employees perform better when they enjoy their work. Overloading employees with unreasonable targets and constantly micromanaging can dampen their enthusiasm, resulting in dwindling performance levels. For instance, rewarding employees for their workable ideas and empowering them to make their own decisions are effective ways of easing work tensions.

Surprise and delight

The feel of a challenge is critical for team success. Setting a challenging objective is one thing; making employees feel the challenge is another ball game altogether. Thus managers must set objectives that would excite the team members and enable them to give their best.

Teamwork can be a great asset provided it is managed well. Hence, organizations that believe in the philosophy of teamwork should be wary of the institutional barriers it harbors and constantly employ methods to circumvent them.