**Case Study 1: Can This Virtual Team Work?**

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Jim Towne is in charge of a virtual team that consists of members spread across the globe. They are all motivated and skilled, but various roadblocks are raising concerns about Towne’s ability to successfully run such a diverse team in a virtual environment. In this case study, we are assessing the current state of Towne’s virtual team and addressing questions regarding its potential for improvement.

**Assessing the Fact-Pattern**

**Question 1**

Towne’s team is lacking several characteristics of team excellence, causing them to fall short of their performative potential (Northouse, 2016). The missing characteristics are:

* **Results driven structure**: The current structure being utilized by Towne’s team is disorganized, unpolished, and frequently sees team members feeling overwhelmed. They have a limited ability to prioritize tasks because they are always trying to catch up, meaning that much less is being accomplished.
* **Unified commitment**: Towne’s team is having trouble working towards the same goals because of the disorganization and lack of structure. They are overwhelmed, and their priorities are reflective of this as they struggle just to perform their basic job functions. One of the team members doesn’t even have time to read all of their emails.
* **Collaborative climate**: The collaborative climate within Towne’s team is almost nonexistent. Their email communications are ineffective because they are multiplied to a particular magnitude the longer any email chain continues. They have also only met in-person twice to plan and coordinate projects and goals.
* **Principled leadership**: The lack of these essential qualities has led me to the conclusion that the team is also lacking in principled leadership. Towne has not sought to implement significant changes that would make the lives of his team-members easier, nor has he pursued any attempt to increase performance. He hasn’t addressed any of the major issues with workload or communication and will have to make some major shifts to transform his team into a more effective and cohesive unit.

**Question 2**

Based on an analysis of Towne’s team’s effectiveness, he should take immediate action to intervene internally. If he were to delay, here is the possibility that much larger issues with trust might develop, wherein group members begin to fight with leadership and among themselves. Additionally, the burnout from such a mismanaged workload might cause Towne to lose valuable team-members, ultimately setting back his company’s implementation goals and deadlines. Towne’s internal intervention should be task-focused, and should be centered around:

* **Task management:** Towne needs to step in and begin planning and prioritizing implementation projects. This may be completed by implementing a new workflow process (perhaps by utilizing agile methodologies) and ensuring that tasks are less overwhelming for team members. This would incorporate principled leadership and results-driven structure into the new team, and as projects are completed, Towne might even be able to have team members work together. This would increase unified commitment and collaborative climate and would likely cause massive increases in team performance and cohesiveness.
* **Communication:** There are problems with meetings and emails that Towne will need to address. Towne should probably have another system for internal communication (like Microsoft Teams) that allows for more direct and less convoluted messaging between team members. Towne might also increase the face-to-face meetings to a single iteration monthly or quarterly as team members become less overwhelmed. This promotes team trust, collaboration, and cohesiveness while still allowing team members time to tackle their tasks and commitments. The results of such interventions would increase unified commitment and collaborative climate.

**Question 3**

To improve the team, Towne has the potential to implement several powerful leadership functions. The relevant functions are:

* **Prioritize tasks and projects:** As stated previously, Towne desperately needs to take a larger role in prioritizing tasks and projects. Team members are exhibiting poor performance because they are overwhelmed and overloaded. This can be effectively remedied with the utilization of a new workflow and direction from Towne, who has better line-of-sight to big-picture goals.
* **Establish more effective communication protocols:** Towne’s team is suffering because they are unable to properly communicate with one another. Emails are lost or unread, and vital communications might fall through the cracks. An effective way to resolve this issue might be to adjust how emails are sent. No longer re-sending entire threads to team members throughout communications would reduce the effort required to simply communicate and will likely even improve relations with clients.
* **Improving meeting schedules:** The team is currently overwhelmed with their essential tasks, but after a new structure is implemented that helps to reduce their individual workloads, it would be a good idea for them to meet in-person monthly or quarterly. This could be an essential move to promote team trust and safety and allows members to associate and bond with each-other more naturally. Team bonding is critical for cohesiveness and overall productivity (Roussin, 2008)
* **Introduce external resources:** It is possible that Towne’s team could benefit from external resources. Towne might consider hiring support staff or a project manager to help him keep the work load manageable for individual team members, especially if he still finds it challenging to keep them from feeling overwhelmed after introducing changes to task prioritization. Additionally, their communicative potential could advance dramatically with the incorporation of software like Microsoft Teams. An instant messaging software would ensure visibility and expediency of communication, in addition to including various other tools.

**References**

Northouse, P. G. (2016). *Leadership: Theory and practice* (7th ed.). Sage.

Roussin, C. J. (2008). Increasing Trust, Psychological Safety, and Team Performance Through Dyadic Leadership Discovery. In *Small Group Research* (Vol. 39, Ser. 2, pp. 224–248). essay, Sage Publishing. Retrieved September 15, 2024, from online.sagepub.com.