

Paul Elling, COM6303.E1, Exercise 3

1. What kind of groups do you have in your organization?

At ARCADIS, there are organizational departments that can also be found at many other companies, such as Accounting and Finance, Human Resources, Legal, Information Technology, Engineering, and Health and Safety. Within the departments are teams that handle more specific functions. For instance, the Human Resources department has a Benefits department that handles employee benefits and acts as an interface between employees, the company, and vendors. Accounting and Finance has a Cash Receipts group that handles cash transactions. Within the Information Technology department, teams such as Systems and Programming, Systems Engineering, and Operations manages the company's information, technology, and network infrastructure. Within the formal departments and across departments, teams are formed for various tasks.

Many teams are "self-managed", which means that each team is responsible for accomplishing its tasks without supervision from a higher authority (DeWine, 2001, p. 293). These teams are comprised of employees who conscientiously execute the required work, while also regulating the team. Coworkers on effective self-managed teams hold each other accountable and are willing to accept legitimate criticism. Within the Systems Engineering team, the database administrators (DBAs) work together as their own team to maintain and enhance databases without managers in the IT department commanding their everyday work. Small teams are formed whenever minor programming changes are deployed to the production environment. Since databases are almost always a core

component of any changes, the DBAs work with programmers as unofficial teams to perform the release of changes to production. Supervisors and managers are briefed on the status of these releases, but they do not typically play a role in the team's work or the management of the work.

“Project teams” are created to work on projects that require specific talents (Eisenberg, 2001, p. 212). In ARCADIS there is a project team that has worked together for a few years that is actually comprised of project managers and programmers. They collaborated on a project that involved implementing Microsoft Project and Microsoft Project Server to give project managers a more feature-rich environment for tracking project status as well as managing the time and cost restraints within the project plan. As well, they have contributed to subsequent projects that have introduced enhancements to the organization's Microsoft Project environment. For these project teams, formal specifications were written that detailed the requirements of the projects as well as the steps to complete them. The circumstances of these projects were that the end users were also the project managers tasked with guiding the projects to their completion. The end users were able to provide the programmers with precise details about what they wanted accomplished.

Since ARCADIS is spread across vast geographical areas, “virtual teams” have become an everyday occurrence (Eisenberg, 2001, p. 217). Email, instant messaging, web cameras, and Microsoft Live Meeting are all utilized for communication, conferencing, and meetings. Live Meeting is an application that provides coworkers with a real-time window of another coworker's desktop. Teams have found Live Meeting to

be especially useful to convey subjects of discussion or presentations without long dialogues about what problems need to be solved. Virtual teams are necessary, because employees are established in offices throughout the country. Their families have homes and are a part of communities. They cannot simply uproot themselves and move to another part of the country or another country entirely for the benefit of the company. Leaders at ARCADIS understand this and have allowed virtual teams to become a reality. Advances in information technology have allowed experts in disparate offices to form effective teams that would not have worked as well in decades past.

2. Identify an unproductive group at work and discuss roadblocks to this group productivity.

Recently there was an unproductive project team that worked on making enhancements to a service quoting system that was instrumental to the company effectively pricing its services. At times, especially in the beginning, the project team was very productive, as the system was new and innovative. Team members were excited about the opportunity to work on this system. Team meetings were aggressive, and the members contributed to the discussions with interesting ideas. However, as time passed, the system became more complex and cumbersome, and the company merged with another company, thereby expanding the project team. As more people became involved in the system, meetings became longer and team members became less interested in the success of the system. Meetings were becoming a roadblock to the team's productivity. Instead of meetings being idea generators like they previously had been, they became more about updating status for each team member. Each meeting was more of an "information briefing" (DeWine, 2001, p. 208). Meetings weren't justified by their purpose; rather, meetings were held for the sake of having a meeting. In the earlier

times of the quoting system's development, the leaders in meetings happened to be the lead programmer and lead business analyst. However, the company became more bureaucratic, and directors began believing that project managers would help increase productivity. The project managers largely tended to keep track of status and initiated the meetings. Project managers devoted a substantial amount of meetings to "procedural issues" rather than actual quoting system issues (DeWine, 2001, p. 215). Beyond tracking the project and creating estimates of time requirements and costs, the project managers did not add value to the development and enhancement of the quoting system. Team members who had previously been productive members of the team tended to engage more in "groupthink", as they became dispirited by the direction the project was heading (Eisenberg, 2010, p. 221). Team members were willing to be agreeable in order to conclude meetings and return to their desks to get back to work.

Another roadblock, or reason why the team became less productive, was that the members were beginning to think they were unimportant to the future of the company. A new Chief Information Officer was brought in to help usher in a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system that would become the main system with which the company would work. Team members began to speak of the consequences of this new system amongst themselves outside of group meetings. They wondered if the new ERP system would render the quoting system obsolete. Team members began to develop a collective sense of reluctance to work hard on a system that might not have a future with the company. The uncertainty and fear of it created a roadblock that was preventing team members from contributing to the project like they previously had been doing.

An additional roadblock related to the introduction of a new ERP system was the service quoting system itself. The system had originally been developed on a platform that was rapidly becoming obsolete. Components and modules built with newer software platforms had been integrated into the ERP system. However, the core of the system had its foundation in the older platform. Programmers on the team were concerned that their skill sets were too closely tied to the ERP system's original software platform. Once the new ERP system would be implemented, their skills might not be needed by the organization. Furthermore, if they had to find new jobs, they were unsure whether or not their skills would still be marketable. A few of the programmers were getting closer to retirement and were not eager to learn entirely new skill sets and look for new employers. Again, fear served as a roadblock for this unproductive group.

3. What are the norms of this unproductive group?

One of the norms of the unproductive service quoting system project team is a tendency to have many group meetings (DeWine, 2001, para. 207). Group meetings have become so standard that members never question the purpose of continuing the meetings. They have simply accepted that the meetings are the status quo. In meetings, each group member gives a rundown of their status on various tasks that have been assigned to them. Rather than contributing to new ideas, team members seem to be content with updating their status. Although they haven't acknowledged it to one another, many group members have collectively developed a "pessimistic view" with regard to the "outcome of meetings" (DeWine, 2001, p. 207). It has become normal for group meetings to be quiet and orderly instead of energetic and lively like they had been in previous times. It's

rather alarming to observe the norm of the group as to what is considered “acceptable behavior” (Eisenberg, 2010, p. 220). The impression is that members of the group would be considered negative influences if they disagreed with someone else in the group, especially if the other person were a project manager. Likewise, if an individual in the group expressed frustration over the fruitlessness of the meetings, he or she might be seen as a poor team player.

Another norm of the unproductive group is to engage in “groupthink” (Eisenberg, 2010, p. 221). Members of the group have suppressed their views of group meetings and the lack of progress of the system’s continued development. They have refrained from voicing their opinions regarding the bureaucratic nature of the company. It has gotten to a point that members of the service quoting system project team convince themselves that a potentially bad idea will not cause harm to the system or the business that the system is supposed to support. In the day-to-day operations of the company, this level of groupthink does not necessarily do harm to the company’s bottom line. However, in the long run, quiet compliance affects the behaviors of employees. A pattern of passive acceptance can tend to envelope employees and make them do just enough to keep their jobs. An example of groupthink for the project team was when it had been decided in a meeting to implement a feature that would keep track of when employees would run reports. The project managers believed this feature to be a good idea and decided to make it a high priority item. The rest of the team went along with the development of the feature rather than suggesting that other items carried more significance to the business. Incorporating this report-tracking feature delayed the development of other features in

addition to postponing the correction of bugs in the system. Groupthink is a norm is unquestionably a norm of this unproductive group.

4. How can the group be made more productive?

Several initiatives could be enacted to make the service quoting system project team more productive. Group meetings could be made more efficient instead of merely having a meeting for the sake of the meeting. Meetings could be made more purposeful. Instead of relaying information during a meeting, it would improve the effectiveness of meetings for team leaders and project managers to dispense information beforehand (DeWine, 2001, para. 208). In addition to passing out information, requesting feedback should be part of the pre-meeting information distribution. If this process yields positive results, the meeting can always be postponed. The information already distributed can be summarized and presented when the group is ready to meet. Alternatively, the group could go ahead with the meeting to follow up on the pre-meeting discussions. During the meeting, the group can assess the information that has already been dispensed. The meeting then becomes an integrative part of a productive process that may require future meetings.

In addition to this type of preparation, group meetings could be made more productive by having “ground rules” established to, among other things, “force people to be quick with comments” (DeWine, 2001, p. 207). Meetings use up precious time, and having them structured in this manner can only help to keep group members from disregarding the importance of truly productive meetings. Members should be encouraged to contribute to meetings with their comments. Pursuing constructive,

meaningful meetings can yield thoughtful, “high-quality decisions” (DeWine, 2001, p. 210). The key for the service quoting system project team is to remove the complacency that has gradually crept into meetings and return the team to meetings that were idea generators. It may require removing team members who have not added value to the system, whether they are project managers, programmers, business analysts, or end users.

Team leaders should also work to reassure veteran programmers of their important roles on the team and within the organization. They should place emphasis on the critical nature of the quoting system and its place in the future of the organization regardless of the new ERP system or any other system. Communication by team leaders is the key to rebuilding enthusiasm for the quoting system. Team leaders must present a consistent message to the employee whom they guide through the various system improvements. Much of the communication to the programmers can reside in their valuable knowledge, both technical and business-wise, about the quoting system. The company will need them to bring their important contributions to the business for a long time to come.

The group could also be made more productive by embracing the idea of “workplace democracy” (Eisenberg, 2010, p. 206). Such a concept allows several members of the group to step up and embrace leadership roles. Leadership can manifest itself through assisting coworkers or setting examples for younger coworkers. Leadership can also be witnessed via increased responsibility accepted by team members for completing more assigned tasks. Group members can also supply the team with more ideas or input that supports or rejects ideas. The concept would provide members of the group with more responsibility in what can also be described as a “multiple stakeholder

model” (Eisenberg, 2010, p. 209). Team members can be encouraged to take more active roles in the success of the system within the organization. Each group member has some degree of control over how much the quoting system remains a fundamental part of the organization’s information technology infrastructure. The idea is to increase each contributing employee’s pride in the system, which should benefit their productivity. The group could be broken up into smaller teams, which would allow each team to become “self-managed” (Eisenberg, 2010, p. 211). By emphasizing individual responsibility for managing work, teams are more apt to unleash creativity in addition to managing themselves. Teams that manage themselves become strategic units for organizations. In the case of the quoting system group, talented programmers, project managers, business analysts, and end users know what the system does. They are also aware of features that need to be incorporated.

5. How can this group be encouraged to work as a team with effective leadership?

To encourage the service quoting system project team to work as a united team with effective leadership, different initiatives can be taken. Team leaders must first understand how important it is for them to remain humble personally and possess a “professional will” that allows them to be effective (Eisenberg, 2010, p. 259). Team leaders must work hard to emphasize the importance of the organization, the system, and the team. Politics between group members can derail projects. Effective team leaders have the choice to allow politics to negatively influence the group or to prevent politics from having any influence whatsoever. Some team may see the quoting system as an opportunity to promote their own professional agenda to build their own empire within

the organization. The service quoting system project team has experienced some of the elements of project managers attempting to control the system for their benefit. These efforts have largely been subtle or insignificant in the overall scheme of the organization. In particular, one project manager was determined to make her mark within the organization by taking the quoting system in a direction that was unnecessary. She had programmers implement several features, some of which were just to show her superiors that she was capable of getting things done. While she has shown promise as a project manager, her ambition has been somewhat misguided, as she does not always show how these features are for the best interests of the organization, especially at the time they are implemented. The team should be guided with effective leadership in a manner that prioritizes the features that should be implemented and the bugs that need to be fixed.

Instead of allowing the group to continue to languish, the leaders could establish structure that was never truly created in the first place in addition to setting necessary objectives (DeWine, 2001, para. 286). When the quoting system was in the early days of being developed, structure in terms of managing the development efforts was not necessarily in place. The team was few in numbers, and they were quite capable of producing the system that the organization needed. As time passed, the quoting system became more complex, which led to development efforts also becoming more complex. What did not keep up with the increased complexity was the management of the system's development. Structure had not truly been established in terms of storing versions of the system in the event that previous versions were needed, maintaining an appropriate staging environment for ensuring effective deployments to production, or for refreshing the development environment with production data. Team leaders should work with the

members to create the structure to support current and future development efforts. Doing so will bring positive and beneficial results to the group. It will show that leadership is effective at continuing to implement changes to the quoting system. Having structure allows programmers and business analysts to operate more effectively at managing their own day-to-day work as well as working together as a team.

With structure and objectives identified, individuals on the team will benefit from knowing what the expectations are for each one of them. Expectations allow roles to be created for each member of the team (DeWine, 2001, para. 291). When employees are able to work without negative surprises along the way, it builds their collective confidence in the system, their team, and the organization's leaders. Clearly defined and understood roles on the team allow team members to become familiar with each other and what they can expect from their teammates. The group becomes a more integrated unit when certain people handle different features of the system. Group members build expertise through their daily work within the system and rely on each other. Leaders demonstrate their effectiveness in conjunction with efforts made by each member of the group. The quoting system would clearly benefit from each member of the group being assigned a role. Of course, some team members would be able to fill multiple roles based on their experience with the quoting system. They could fill in for members when it becomes necessary or when a member of the group leaves the organization altogether.

It's important for the team's leaders to reach out to each member as an individual to understand their concerns and needs and to reassure them that their input and influence are valued by the team and organization (DeWine, 2001, para. 292). Every member of the quoting system team needs to have confidence that his or her efforts are important to

the team and the organization as a whole. As enhancements continue to be made to the quoting system, each team member adds to their experience and skill set. Effective leadership can be demonstrated by giving members of the team increased responsibility as the development ensues. Building confidence in the system, the team, and the organization is the responsibility of team leaders, but they need the help of each member of the group to accomplish tough objectives.

References

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