Management Development
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Essay Question 3

Student Number 1121320

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1 Introduction

Henry Ford is famous for being the first to fully implement Fredrick Winslow Taylor's principles of scientific management, leading to Ford being the leading car manufacturer in the world. However, the downside of his success was that deskilling of labour and scientific management of the labour process lead to extreme alienation of the employees resulting in job dissatisfaction amongst the workers (Beynon 1975). This was also a part of Harry Braverman's criticism of capitalism's industrial development, commenting on how deskilling of labour and scientific management of the labour process made the workers alienated to their workplace (Braverman 1974).

This was definitely one of the reasons why Ford introduced teamworking as a part of the corporate strategy in the mid 1980s when they tried out total quality management. The organisation of Ford then started using teams as the centre of its organism (Robbins 1998, 115).

The first companies to use teamworking as the main method of production were Volvo, Toyota and General Foods in the early 1980s, and it attracted a lot of attention because no one else was doing it at the time. Since then, teamworking has rapidly been expanding as a way of organising work and is now a well established in the world of management and most organisations have employees working in a team of some kind (Robbins 1998, 284).

In the world human resources management, the term "teamworking" is one of the hottest phrases used these days. One may argue that it has been promoted as the solution to all management problems and have conquered the industrial world since its introduction in the early 1980s (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001, 623).

In spite of all the positive publicity of teamworking, there is quite a lot of scepticism towards it. This is well illustrated by Hayes who states: *"team is a word for managers"* (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001, 374). And to some extent he is right. It is not as simple as introducing teamworking in the workplace and expect increased production and greater job satisfaction. I will in this essay present the different conditions that have to be present in order to get successful teamworking.

2 Conditions for successful teamworking

2.1 The team members

The perhaps most obvious condition for successful teamworking is the members of the team. Often this point is forgotten, but it is nevertheless extremely important to the understanding of creating good teamworking in an organisation.

Teamwork requires its members to be comfortable with challenging tasks involving multiple skills and communication across traditional established networks. If the members of the team are reluctant to change, and to learn new technology and methods of working, the teamwork is deemed to fail. The members must value a continual learning process and must enjoy complex tasks (Robbins 1998, 303).

2.2 Task

The success of teamworking greatly depends on the kind of task the team is set to solve. Hackman (1987) claims that the task the team is given must include a need for a variety of high level skills (Huczynski & Buchanan

2001, 375). The need for multiple skills for successive teamworking is also supported by Robbins (1998).

Not all tasks are suitable for teamwork, and even within teams there are different kinds of teams suitable for different tasks. Robbins (1998) differentiates between three types of teams, namely problem solving teams, self managing teams and cross functional teams (Robbins 1998, 287).

The first type is the one found in quality circles, which is often used by management to give the employees a sense of involvement and empowerment (Hyman & Mason 1995, 88-9). Quality circles involves sharing of information and ideas, but the teams themselves are given no autonomy or authority to carry out work as they see best fit. This kind of team is referred to as advice team by Meuse & Futrell, and is by that giving a good description of what the team is about; getting advice from the workers on how to best conduct the work at the company (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001, 378-80).

Self managing teams is the second kind of team according to Robbins. These teams are given the authority and autonomy to detect, correct and implement changes as they see fit in the workplace (Robbins 1998, 287).

Cross functional teams is the last type of team according to Robbins, and it takes its members from different parts of the organisation. This team therefore operates across department boundaries and cultures, although it is restricted to the horizontal dimension of the organisation chart. The cross functional teams do not expand over the vertical dimension, challenging the hierarchical structure of a company.

2.3   Team size

Another obvious factor in teamworking, is the size of the teams. Small teams are good for action taking tasks, such producing a computer program (Robbins 1998, 275).

After Ford's adoption of teamworking as its main organising mechanism in the mid 1980s, they have published what they believe is the context for good teamworking. In their list of vital conditions for teamworking, small groups is the first crucial element for success success in teamworking (Robbins 1998, 299).

Cross functional teams is considered a medium sized group, and is a popular form of teamworking. It uses employees for different parts of the organisation to accomplish a task. The employees are selected from different parts of the horizontal dimension of the organisation hierarchy, but not the vertical. These teams are seen as a dynamic way of organising work, even though they may be hard to manage because of their size. Therefore it is advised to consider dividing teams of that size into sub teams (Robbins 1998, 290).

When it comes to the actual definition of a small group, the world of group psychology has a common rule that the magic number for small groups is seven. However, Belbin (1981) argues that six is the ultimate number. He argues that companies of six employees seems to be perform better than seven man companies, even though the seven man companies have the numerical advantage (Belbin 1981, 115-7).

Bigger teams, on the other hand, are good for decision making and fact finding tasks (Robbins 1998, 275). Groups are considered to a good thing

when the quality of the output is the major concern. This argument is also supported by Vroom and Yetton who list quality as one of the three aspects to consider in connection with teamworking (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001, 743).

2.4 Resources

Although Belbin is most famous for team roles, he argued also for other requirements that had to be met for getting successful teamworking, and resources was one of these elements. Belbin claimed that employees must be given enough resources in order to be fully empowered. This includes access to the appropriate technology, the project the team is to work with must be given enough money to be carried out in a satisfying manner. The team must also have the right machinery available in order to conduct successful teamwork (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001, 263).

2.5 Feedback

Sundström et al. listed feedback as one of the crucial points of successful teamworking. The team needs to get continuous feedback on the work they are doing. How the output is perceived by the rest of the company and how they are functioning as a team (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001, 396). This is also supported by Hackman (1987) who argues that a team needs regular feedback on how they are doing in order to become an effective team (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001, 375).

The importance of feedback to the team is also supported by the outcomes of the famous Hawthorne studies in the 1920s and 1930s in the US. Workers' performance were measured under different conditions, such as dif-

ferent lighting, working times and food supply. The theory they had, was that the better the conditions were, the better performance the company would get from the workers. However, when the studies had been running for some time and the researches made the conditions worse for the workers, the production output to their surprise continued to rise. Therefore, one of the conclusions after the Hawthorne studies was that workers perform better when getting regular feedback and attention by the organisation they work for (Hodgetts 1991, 12-3).

2.6 Autonomy

Autonomy was another of elements pointed out by Belbin. The group must be given a decent amount of autonomy in order to be reach its potential (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001, 263). This is also supported by Hackman (1987) who argued that the team members must be equipped with enough autonomy to decide how work is to be conducted (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001, 375).

Autonomy is also held as a crucial context for teamworking by Sundström et al.. They argued that the task itself must hold be a mission of a certain degree of clarity. A team will not function well, if the intended mission is ambiguous or without a visible goal with impact on other people. Hackman (1987) argue that it is crucial for teamworking that the output of the teamwork is visible and that this output has consequences for other people. This, he argues, is vital for the team to sustain their motivation and enthusiasm for continuing working in a team and not wanting to either leave the company or revolt to other, more traditional ways of working in

the company (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001, 375-8).

The environment in which the team members are to work within must also be made suitable for teamworking. The physical surrounding must encourage communication between the members and not hinder any processes that is vital for this way of working (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001, 375).

Sundström et al. also mentions that the organisation culture must be such that teamworking is encouraged and supported. Without an organisational understanding of what teamworking is, and how it can prosper, it is hard for the teamwork to evolve as planned (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001, 396). How the teamworking will work in a longer time perspective is very much dependent on how the teamwork is perceived by the rest of the organisation and how it integrates with the rest of the company's activities.

The development of the team itself is also important. If the team just retain the status quo, the team members' enthusiasm will turn into apathy and the team will get ineffective. Therefore, Sundström et. al. stress that a continuous development of the team is in itself a critical part of gaining successful teams (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001, 398). This can also be related to the intrinsic rewards of teamwork together with the individuals' need for self actualisation, thus to develop their skills and to gain higher status in the group, as described by Abraham Maslow (Maslow 1970, 22).

2.7 Culture

The national culture is another aspect to take into consideration when evaluating the prosperity of teamworking. It is argued that in cultures that has a great degree of collectivism, teamworking has better conditions for succeed-

ing than in very individualistic societies (Robbins 1998, 294).

Collectivism here is used as described by Gert Hofstede in his studies of the cultural differences in 40 countries around the world (Hofstede 1984, 148-177). He identified the degree of individualism (as opposed to collectivism) was one of four main dimension one could measure cultural differences. As an example, United States of America is listed as a very individualistic society, whereas Pakistan is one of the most collectivistic cultures.

The company culture is also a very important issue to consider when assessing teamworking. The company itself must provide a culture and organisational structure that allows the emergence of teamworking and encourages it in practise and not just in theory as is often done. Teamworking as other ways of empowering employees have often stagnated on its way to implementation in organisations (Rosenfeld & Wilson 1999, 101).

2.8 Composition of group

Sundström et al. also stresses the need for the importance of the right composition of a group. The group needs to have the right balance of technical ability, knowledge and interpersonal skills in order to function optimally (Brown 2000, 69).

R. Meridith Belbin conducted significant research on the area of team roles and how to accomplish the perfect balanced team. Belbin identified nine team roles that all needed to be fulfilled in order for the group to function properly together. This does not mean that a group has to consist of nine members. Quite on the contrary, Belbin argues strongly that the groups of six is the sacred number for small groups (Belbin 1981, 115-7). However, all

of the nine team roles should be fulfilled, thus some team members may take more than one role contributing to the full group picture.

The first team role is the "chairman", who is the person that decides how to best utilise the strengths of the group and leads the group in its progress. The "company worker" is the team role that implements ideas and theories efficiently and effectively. The "completer - finisher" is the person that has the drive to get the projects finished and is aware of subjects that need especially much attention. The "functional role" is the member of the group that has the technical in-depth competence to assert the technical challenging tasks the group is facing. "Monitor - evaluator" is the team member, that by evaluating ideas and analysing problems, makes sure that the team is able to make balanced decisions. The "plant" is responsible for contributing new ideas and strategies to the team, with attention to major issues. The "resource investigator" is a role that researches external sources and establishes network outside the team that the team can use in order to complete its tasks. The "shaper" is the one that specifies the shape of the work of the group in accordance with were the group is going. The "shaper" directs the attention to the important objectives and priorities. The last of Belbin's roles is the "team worker". This role is concerned with the common good of the team, drawing upon the major opinions in the group. The last of Belbin's team roles is the "team worker" who works for improving communication within the group and to build up the team spirit (Belbin 1981).

Another advantage of having clearly defined roles in a team is that it contributes to the identity of the individuals in the group (Brown 2000, 72).

Group diversity is seen as an asset to teamworking in the context of international human resource management, contributing to giving a clear understanding of local differences in the different markets the company operates under and helping the company to "think globally and act locally" (Mendenhall & Oddou 2000, 7-8). However, it is argued that a certain group cohesiveness influences the team's effectiveness (Robbins 1998, 275). Global, multinational companies therefore tries to make the teams in the organisation be moderately geographical cohesive, selecting team members from similar cultures to work together. This also makes it also easier for the employees to have a family life and still work for a global company that expects them to travel between multiple offices in different countries (Mendenhall & Oddou 2000, 18-36).

On the other hand, critics such as Brown (2000) argue that group cohesiveness is not necessarily a good thing as most human resource management books claim. He also questions the source of group cohesion, claiming that it is performance that causes group cohesion and not the other way around, as most HRM books claim. Furthermore, Brown argues that cohesion based on commitment to the group task gives far greater team performance than cohesion based on interpersonal commitment to the group (Brown 2000, 53).

3 Leadership

The need of good leadership has been acknowledged for a long time. Le Bon, a contemporary of Freud, stressed the importance of a group leader, and described the leader as a person with with strong faith in his ideas and goals and with a strong drive to lead the will of the group (Freud 1921, 81).

A team leader is both responsible for achieving the goals set for the team and is for the social organisation of the group (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001, 392). Critics argue that the team ideology oversimplifies the need of leadership, that a self managing team without a traditional leader is an utopia that will not work in practise (Robbins 1998, 304). If there is no clear leadership of the team, the effect might be that the team get paralysed (Robbins 1998, 293-301).

Also, in a group there is two kinds of leadership; one task specialist and one social emotional specialist. Both are leaders in their own right. The task specialist is the "formal" leader with responsibility for the progress and drive of the group. However, as studies have shown, there is also a social emotional leader in the group that is responsible for the social drive of the group, contributing to a good atmosphere to the teamwork (Brown 2000, 69).

4 Trust

Trust is an important factor to be considered in the relationship between the leader of a group and the group members, and so also in a work team. In order to have effective teamworking, there must be a high degree of mutual trust in the team. The leader must trust the team members to do what they are supposed to do, and the members must be sure that the leader is doing what he is supposed, and also that he keeps his promises to the group, about rewards, goals and deadlines. Also, the individual team members must trust each other to do what everyone is suspected to, that there is no social loafing where some members take advantage of others doing their job. In as

successful team, all the members are responsible for the common good of the team and their individual work (Robbins 1998, 293).

Social loafing was as a problem of work was also recognised by Fredrick W. Taylor and was a problem that was addressed when he developed his theories of scientific management (Braverman 1974, 98).

Strong trust does not come over night, and is built over time by a number of factors. A person needs to have certain integrity, that is a honesty and truthfulness over himself. Furthermore, competence is a vital source of trust and perhaps the most obvious one, since competence traditionally, is a primary condition for employment. The team members also needs to be consistent with what they are doing, by being reliable so that the others can rely on them delivering what they are supposed to the given time. Members must also have a good judgement in handling situations, seeing what needs doing at the given time. The team spirit also requires loyalty from its team members. Members must be ready so stand up for each other and defend each other from attacks from outside the group. The whole team philosophy naturally also claim a certain degree of openness from the team members to share information, ideas and rewards. Since teamworking is a collectivistic effort to solve problems (Robbins 1998, 294).

4.0.1 Rewards

Because teamworking is an act of collectivism, the reward system should also be collective. This way, the team members will feel that not only did they get intrinsic rewards by the accomplishment of the team output, but also the extrinsic rewards are in the spirit of collectivism, inspiring to further work in the team. This appreciation of Collectivistic rewards is also subject to the

training of team members (Robbins 1998, 293-7).

The importance of a reward system in successful teamworking is also supported Sundström et al. who argue that both material rewards and intrinsic rewards such as recognition from the rest of the organisation is important factors in teamworking (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001, 396).

5 Conclusion

Naturally, not everything about teamworking is of a positive nature. Failure in teamworking accounts for a staggering 70% of all accidents in air traffic (Huczynski & Buchanan 2001, 374) and it is argued by several critics that the success teamworking is dependent on the task and teamworking is not applicable to all kinds of tasks.

Nevertheless, the popularity and expansion of teamworking has become substantial and continue to spread further into the world of management. One of the reasons for this, in addition to increased job satisfaction, higher quality solutions and creativity, is that teamworking gives additional benefits that otherwise would be missed by the team members.

Employees get improved communication skills, expanded job skills and greater understanding of technology. Team members also get skilled in decision making processes and develop their interpersonal skills. This in effect is beneficial for the company that get more organisational flexibility with more people in the organisation that know more, about the organisation they work within and what other employees are doing in the company (Robbins 1998, 303).

Sadly enough, teamworking is not the definite answer to all managerial

problems. It is not a magic formula as many HRM books tend to argue, but it does represent a good, and sometimes superior, alternative on how to solve a great percentage of tasks companies face in the modern world of work.

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