

Virtual Management Of Teams: A Revolutionary Approach

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ABSTRACT

There's an ironic story in the Christian Bible written by John the apostle, which tells of Jesus the Christ taking a basin of water and washing his disciples' feet. One of the disciples, a man named Peter, refused to allow his leader (rabbi) to do this. Jesus told him if he didn't allow him to wash his feet, Peter would not have a place on the team of disciples. Given this choice Peter told Jesus to not only wash his feet but to wash his hands and his head as well. (Bar-Zebedee, 90-100) While this story is used numerous times from the pulpits of Christianity, it also provides us with a great lesson in the evolving leadership practices required in the management of virtual teams.

Introduction

There is an old military axiom that I drew from, to coin the term, "You manage objects; you lead people" (Kharvi, 2006). If applied correctly, a good manager will utilize different approaches to the way he or she allocates resources. It is relatively easy to manage objects given a simple understanding of math and knowing when and where to allocate resources as necessary. This is because objects don't have needs. People have needs and because of this require a different blend of resource allocation principles to be applied. While we have found this to be true in the normal application of business principles and we even teach our future managers the difference between management and leadership, a new (or not so new) environment is taking place in the corporations of the world today. The corporate world is getting smaller. Clifford Gray and Erik Larson identify four different kinds of projects and, by extension, corporate endeavors, today. They refer to domestic practices as being performed in a native country; overseas practices executed in a foreign country for a native country; foreign endeavors executed by a native country in a foreign country for a business in that country and; a global business endeavor being executed across national boundaries usually by multinational organizations utilizing individuals from differing countries working together as a team to accomplish a specific endeavor (Gray & Larson, 2007). In each of these cases, industry has moved into the use of virtual teams and in some cases to the exclusive use of virtual teams. Just as in distributive computing, where the effort of the computing power is spread out to many different separated computers, so to is the sum of the team effort parceled out to the different members of the team. And, just as in the example of distributive computing the locale of the members on a virtual team is often separated by distance or country. How to manage and lead such teams has produced many different approaches over the years with varying degrees of success. This paper provides an approach that is based on historical success and precedence. This approach is a basic approach but constitutes a major paradigm shift in the world of business management. In distributive computing there is one computer that services all the other computers to allow them to do their individual work. Yet this computer is the focal point for all computers to pass data through, store data, exchange data and reconcile differences through. We call this computer a "server" because while it isn't the most powerful computer or, the most versatile computer or, even the most expensive computer, it is a workhorse that is reliable, available, maintainable, and dependable. In the research and development world we call this RAM-D and we look for machines that meet each of these expectations. I submit to you that, in the development of a virtual team, we must also look for a team lead that holds these qualities. We can call this person a team server or service leader. And, I will postulate that in order to lead virtual teams a manager must be a serving manager instead of a directing manager. This new paradigm turns the historical concept of managing upside down. But it has historical precedence from our opening example of early Christianity all the way up through such management thinkers as Douglas McGregor, Frederick Herzberg, and Abraham Maslow.

In order to lead virtual teams a manager must be a serving manager instead of a directing manager. The analogy for this concept is that leading virtual teams is like implementing distributive (server based) computing. There is historical precedence for such a type of leader management.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

This study was a research of historical concepts and principles based on proven uses of leadership and management approaches for large groups not under the direct control or supervision of the leader or manager. This research followed three distinct categories to provide different viewpoints for similar applications of these principles. The three categories were Military, Religious, and Commerce to address three distinct and differing approaches to leadership and management of peoples not under one's direct supervision. All three categories provide solid examples of distributive leadership and management. In each category certain succinct principles were applied to successful completion of missions, theology, or mercantilism. All three categories were analyzed from a historical perspective and common traits were then applied to an analysis of similar contemporary management concepts for server management. Three distinct contemporary management theories evolved that followed the historical precedence.

DISCUSSION

Analysis of Historical Precedence for Server Management

A review of successful military leaders included Son Tzu who admonished us to, "Regard your soldiers as your children, and they will follow you into the deepest valleys; look on them as your own beloved sons, and they will stand by you even unto death" (Tzu, 600 BC). Julius Caesar's perception that, "What we wish, we readily believe, and what we ourselves think, we imagine others think also" (Caesar, 100-44 BC) predates McGregor's premise that each employee wants to do a good job and, given the chance, will work towards that end (McGregor, 2006). The East India Trading Company followed these tenets in allowing what might be thought to be unparalleled latitude in the way it allowed distant merchant directors to control their own areas of operations as long as the bottom line was sustained and improved on (Keay, 1993). George S. Patton advocated that we, "Don't tell people how to do things, tell them what to do and let them surprise you with their results" (Patton, Best Leadership Quotes, 2008). His great Ardennes offensive that, when executed pulled an entire Army off the front lines to run parallel to the lines of combat and reinserted over 205,000 men back into another part of the battle shows what server leadership can do (Patton, War As I Knew It, 1975). Recently, Jack Welch tells us, "Globalization has changed us into a company that searches the world, not just to sell or to source, but to find intellectual capital - the world's best talents and greatest ideas" (Mezak, 2006). Again, Welch realized that, "Giving people self-confidence is by far the most important thing that I can do. Because then they will act" (Welch, 2001).

Analysis of Military Command and Control

A synthesis of these complementary thoughts was conducted and tested. It showed that two distinct objects can be met or blended together. The East India Company showed an object managed organization that allowed relative freedom of subordinate personnel as long as objects were managed to the good of the organization (Keay, 1993). In this regard even people were managed and few instances were found of leadership by example. Conversely, People Led Leadership was found in many military situations but objects were found not to be managed optimally. Rommel was an exception where necessity dictated he lead people, and manage limited resources frugally to achieve his mission. (Liddell-Hart, 1953) One of the results of the Normandy invasion was the emergence of the military's Five Paragraph Field Order that, in many regards, is also followed in many industry plans. (Army, 1997) In this plan the writer addresses the situation (people), the mission or purpose of the effort (people), the concept of the operation or plans (people), the implementation processes (objects) and the logistics (objects). Many a military plan, project or program plan and business plan follow these precepts. As a result of this type of planning the stage is set for people to implement. But, how does this apply to the contemporary concepts of

server leadership? That is, how do we know that given a good plan, people can execute on their own without continuous supervision and guidance? Many of our contemporary business authors have given us this answer.

Analysis of Contemporary Precedence for Server Management

An analysis of contemporary leadership theories shows how people, given the opportunity, can take a well prepared plan and with minimal direction (interference) can achieve or exceed the organizational objectives. In his book, *The Human Side of Enterprise*, Douglas McGregor postulated two opposing theories that, for him, encapsulated the polarity of management principles. The Theory X Variable assumed, at one end of the management spectrum is a Charles Dickens type Scrooge management precept that the average employee dislikes work and will attempt to avoid it, has no ambition and seeks no responsibility, is self-centered, will resist any form of change, and lacks appreciable intelligent and is therefore gullible. This management principle was strongly adhered to during the industrial revolution, but McGregor proposed a different management theory built on Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Need in achieving the higher needs of esteem and self-actualization resulting in the Theory Y Variable (Maslow, 1999). Under Theory Y the average worker works as naturally as if he or she were at play or rest; they are self-directed and meet work objectives if properly established, they are committed to these objectives if the opportunity to achieve self-fulfillment is provided as a reward and they will seek responsibility to achieve self-actualization because there is a common denominator of creativity and ingenuity that allows people to assume responsibility on their own.

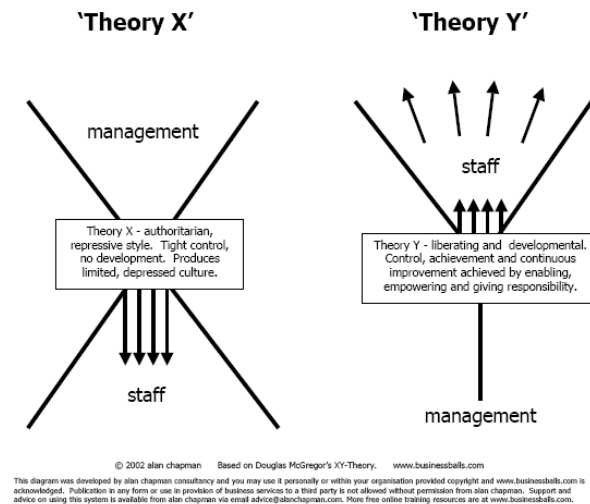


Figure 1

Analysis of Frederick Herzberg's Hygiene Theory, with regard to this study, brings to light two of his postulates, that of the Dissatisfaction Variable, and the Satisfaction Variable (Herzberg, 1959). Given that workers are self-motivated towards an objective and that objective is well defined to them, according to Herzberg they will need to see satisfaction in the results. A well defined statement of a team's work with identifiable standards and checkpoints or milestones along the way provides an environment of free endeavor to allow a team to work toward a goal needing only the support, not the supervisory direction of the manager. If this is a given then there must be examples of this from the research that validates such a reversal of a supervisor's role.

Comparative Analysis of Contemporary Theory

The military has the longest history of conducting operations in virtual or virtual-like situations over vast distances. This is accomplished in what one might assume to be a Theory X form of control; especially since the military refers to mission accomplishment through command and control. But, a closer look at military doctrine identifies motivational theory and the hierarchy of need as precepts for commanders (leaders). Military doctrine states that, "Command and control is the exercise of authority and direction by a properly designated commander over assigned and attached forces in the accomplishment of the mission. Command and control



Figure 2

functions are performed through an arrangement of personnel, equipment, communications, facilities, and procedures employed by a commander in planning, directing, coordinating, and controlling forces and operations in the accomplishment of the mission” (Army, 1997). Therefore, “[C]ommanders exercise control by—

- Acquiring and applying means to accomplish the commander’s intent.
- Defining limits.
- Determining requirements.
- Allocating means.
- Monitoring status and performance and reporting significant changes to the commander.
- Developing specific guidance from general guidance.
- Forecasting change. (Army, 1997)

Industry has found these same tenets to hold true. Thomas Kolditz, in his book *In Extremis Leadership- Leading as if Your Life Depended on It*, compares leadership styles found to be successful in challenging situation. He compares what he calls extremis leadership to crisis leadership where, like professional military leaders, extremis leaders are professional and self-selected; crisis leaders are not (Kolditz, 2007). Kolditz goes on to state the extremis leaders are inherently motivating, they embrace continuous learning, they share risk with followers, and have a common lifestyle with followers. Probably the most important characteristic they have, in my opinion, is the ability to inspire high competence and trust with the people they are in charge of and beyond to others. A manager of virtual teams today must inspire, motivate and allocate the virtual team with the means (emotional, psychological, and physical) to accomplish their tasks on their own without direct supervision. Recruiting company Decision Toolbox is just one of many cases that show that virtual teams made up of self-starters can work from home to provide profitable, efficient business operations based on good management that inspires, motivates and allocates the virtual team with the means to accomplish their tasks on their own without direct supervision. Half of Decision Toolbox’s recruiters are commission-only employees; the other half are independent contractors. In either case, the company doesn’t tell them when to work. The recruiters tell the company when they will work. Instead of logging the recruiters’ hours, the company measures them on performance, such as customer satisfaction, amount of repeat business and percent of job candidates who are hired. Decision Toolbox identified self-starters who could work without a supervisor standing over them. They hired recruiters with years of experience — the average is 17 years — who valued flexibility, working from home and the ability to do just recruiting and not sales or writing ads. Decision Toolbox provides its virtual teams (pods) with tools to prequalify job candidates and professional writers to write enticing job descriptions for Internet job boards. The company assigns recruiters to groups of three or four. These pods have weekly Internet meetings to help one another solve problems. The manager’s responsibility is to define objectives, determine requirements, allocate the means to accomplish the job, and monitor performance for control as needed (Norman, 2007). Basically, as in distributive computing where the effort of the computing power is spread out to many different separated computers, so to is the sum of the team effort parceled out to the different members of the team.

CONCLUSION

Historical Precedence for Server Management

The concept of server leadership is not a new concept but it is revolutionary. Even earlier than that moment that Jesus washed his disciples’ feet, an ancient Chinese general by the name of Sun Tzu advocated the support of military troops. This concept has been passed down through the military to the present. That is, “Take care of your troops and they will take care of you.” It is a basic tenet that a good manager provides the necessary logistical support for a team to be effective. But, with virtual teams, one must go beyond that and anticipate special or specific needs based on differing environments. A global team is spread out around the globe. Providing one

model of computer to work with all team members will not meet the needs of team members in countries with different power, connectivity and usability differences. Douglas McGregor postulated, in his 1960 book *The Human Side of Enterprise*, that the average person is proud of his or her skills, and if the job is satisfying, he or she will commit to goals of the organization; that that average person will not only accept but seek out responsibility, and, given the opportunity, they will use imagination, creativity, and ingenuity to solve work problems. Based on what we have learned about human behavior since McGregor proposed a different way of managing people, we find the Theory Y approach results in greater productivity than the traditional Theory X approach. A tenet of Theory Y is that, since the employee wants to do his or her best, they can be given direction, and, without direct supervision, can accomplish the expected results on their own.

Contemporary Precedence for Server Management

An organization based on the precepts of Theory X, requiring continuous direct supervision by the manager, cannot and will not be successful in today's global market, even with totalitarian organization. This was realized by Decision Toolbox, a recruiting company that eliminated the office environment and has found that Theory Y type employees who work from home can perform profitable and efficient operations (Orange County Register, 2007). Kim Shepherd, an expert in virtual teams found that she could aggrandize her organizations capabilities and reduce overhead through the use of virtual employees. However, even with her knowledge of virtual teams she discovered that, "The company hierarchy is flipped. The management team works for them," Shepherd said. "I constantly ask, "What can I do to make your job better?" (Orange County Register, 2007). The article goes on to say, Marcia Cordova of Garden Grove, Calif., has been a recruiter for more than 20 years, three of them with Decision Toolbox. "You can make a lot of money, depending on how hard you want to work," she said. "I don't need as much money. I need more time and flexibility because I have two grandchildren with two more on the way" (Orange County Register, 2007). The nature of this type of work today makes McGregor's postulates even more valid than they were in the 1950's and 1960's. The application of McGregor's thinking to today's global business enterprise continues to show us that unique and unconventional management techniques to enhance virtual employee effectiveness is crucial to organizational effectiveness. Following McGregor's lead, industry needs to change its concept of employee management and expand on his ideas for the global workplace.

How does this apply to management in today's environment you might ask? I'm glad you asked that question. Most organizations understand the need to utilize McGregor's Theory Y in virtual teams, and most companies are now using virtual teams. In fact, eighty percent of companies use virtual employees today and by 2008 we will see 41 million virtual employees world-wide. The trend is towards home based distributive employee operations. Keeping these diversified workers focused on the same goals and objectives at coordinated times requires a different management approach even with the use of Theory Y type employees. Dominic M. Thomas, an assistant professor of information systems and operations management at Emory University discovered that, "there are real challenges trying to put together teams to do good" (Thomas, 2007). He found, working with Peace Corps virtual teams in Nepal, that even with teams where everyone wants to work together, they tend to end up with problems and breaking down. Frederick Herzberg seemed to envision this very situation when he developed his Motivation-Hygiene theory describing the factors causing employee motivation as compared to what he called employee hygiene factors or factors leading to dissatisfaction. Of Herzberg's top six factors causing employee dissatisfaction, four of them (supervision, relationships with one's boss, work conditions, and relationships with one's peers) can be directly mitigated through proper implementation of virtual employee teams. The other two (policy and salary) can be emphasized through server leadership. Herzberg reasoned that there are two distinct human needs to be taken care of for the worker. The first is the physiological need to take care on one's physical environment and the second is the psychological human need to allow for growth. This opens the way to Maslow's hierarchy theory that needs must be addressed in a hierarchical manner for actualization to be realized. If we utilize Maslow's assumption of base needs being taken care of first, to address Herzberg's two sets of human needs, we can see that the manager must first take care of the physiological and security needs of the worker and then the psychological needs can be addressed. This means that salary and work conditions must be addressed first, then with positive virtual work techniques relationships with peers and supervisors can be cultivated and grown. Policies can be group co-developed to meet organizational expectations through stakeholders to ensure buy-in. Policies need to be revisited by the group to ensure continual acceptance for the good of the team. Again this is what Kim Shepherd referred to as management being turned upside down (Tyler, 1998). The manager is a facilitator for

organizational effectiveness vice a dictator putting out organizational expectations. "Leadership is defined as the ability to get others to do your will. Great leadership is the ability to accomplish the same thing but having others think that it is their idea". (Tyler, 1998)

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FIGURES

Figure 1. Chapman, A. (2004, November 26). *BuinessBalls*. Retrieved March 5, 2008, from Douglas McGregor's XY Theory: <http://www.alanchapman.com/>

Figure 2. Tyler, M. (1999). *Lecture slides*. Colorado Springs: Webster University.