Collaborate to build effective teams to achieve organizational excellence and effectiveness

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to collaborate to build effective teams to achieve organizational excellence and effectiveness.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper outlines a blueprint to build an effective team based on various personality types leveraging their competencies and capabilities.

Findings – It implores to identify various personality types of your team members, leverage their strengths, understand their expectations and apply different leadership tools and techniques as per the situation to build an effective team.

Practical implications – The tools and techniques adopted by leaders to build teams can be applied in any industry and in any size of organization.

Social implications – The social implications of this research suggests that leaders can do much better by collaborating to bring synergy in team members.

Originality/value – It outlines to lead three types of employees – actors, spectators and speed breakers in the workplace. It underscores to replace competitive mindset with a collaborative mindset to build successful teams.

Keywords Organizational development, Collaboration, Leadership development, Team building

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

> Teamwork is the ability to work together toward a common vision. The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results (Andrew Carnegie).

Building an effective team is easier said than done. You can manage machines easily, not people. You can press buttons and get the things done by machines mechanically. Whereas managing men throws lots of challenges as they have different mindsets, emotions, egos and feelings. Leaders must find out various personality types, mindsets, emotions and expectations of the team members to motivate them to accomplish their organizational objectives.

Synergy is strength

Stephen R. Covey in his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* highlights the significance of working in teams as one of the habits – *Synergize.* Hence, all leaders irrespective of their industry must acquire the ability to work in teams and collaborate to build effective teams. There are innumerable advantages of working in teams. Leaders can leverage the strengths of their team members as everyone has strengths. When they come together, they become

a powerful team. Most organizations craft their vision, articulate it effectively, create a strong organizational culture, build strong teams, leverage the strengths of its employees and finally, accomplish their vision. Hence, when leaders build teams, they utilize the strengths of their precious human resources to improve the organizational bottom lines. George Bernard Shaw rightly remarked, "If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas." Hence, exchanging ideas generate more ideas thus providing solutions to lots of problems.

Understand four personality types

It is essential to understand various personality types to build effective teams. Alessandra and O'Connor (1998) outlined four personality types in their award-winning book *The Platinum Rule*: *Discover the Four Basic Business Personalities and How They Can Lead You to Success*[1] – Directors, Relaters, Socializers and Thinkers. "Directors" are firm and forceful, confident and competitive, decisive and determined risk-takers. "Socializers" are outgoing, optimistic and enthusiastic people who like to be at the center of things. "Relaters" are genial team players who like stability more than risk, and who care greatly about relationships with others. "Thinkers" are self-controlled and cautious, preferring analysis over emotion. Directors and Socializers both prefer open and direct communication, whereas Relaters and Thinkers are more reserved and indirect. Directors and Thinkers focus on work tasks, in contrast to Relaters and Socializers, who focus on people. Understanding these personality types helps you identify your personality and also that of your team members to build leadership compatibility and enhance your leadership effectiveness.

A blueprint to build a successful team

Here is a blueprint to build your team successfully:

- Identify the personality types and assess the strengths and weaknesses of your team members and allocate them with roles and responsibilities as per their strengths and competencies.

- Encourage diversity in your team to get more ideas and insights. It brainstorms the team to get more solutions to problems.

- Be transparent to build trust in your team. It inspires them to deliver their best.

- Inculcate emotional intelligence in your team members to enable them to get along with others easily.

- Provide clarity of tasks to be executed to eliminate any differences of opinions and views among the team members. It helps them work as per the expected objectives.

- Empower your team members. Allow them to explore and experiment. If they fail, correct and ask them to learn lessons from failures. Do not criticize them.

- Create healthy organizational culture and climate for employees to contribute their best. Culture connects employees to create an emotional bonding to improve organizational bottom lines. For instance, leaders like A.G. Lafley of P&G, Tony Hsieh the CEO of Zappos. com and Ross Fowler, the Managing Director, Cisco Systems Australia strove hard to connect people by emphasizing organizational culture.

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- Adopt different tools and techniques to different team members based on their needs and expectations. Additionally, adopt situational leadership to enhance your team's effectiveness. Remember, there is no one-size-fits-all approach in team building.

- Do not micromanage. Give them assignments and enough time to breathe to execute their tasks. Give them freedom to work as they might surprise you with their performance.

- Make your team members special. Build confidence in them that they will be able to execute tasks without any hiccups.

- Offer them feedback to enable them to assess their strengths and concerns. It helps them overcome their concerns to grow as better performers and leaders.

- Allay any apprehensions and fears among your team members. Constantly inspire them about the possibilities to execute vision effectively. Enlighten them to look at the door that is opened, not the one that is closed.

- Emphasize on stretch goals. When employees stretch, they unlock their hidden potential. For instance, Jack Welch emphasized on stretch goals and succeeded as a CEO in GE.

- Align their energies and efforts toward organizational goals constantly.

- Take initiative to inspire your employees as they prefer to work under good leaders than bad bosses. Above all, treat your employees as people, not as workers.

Leaders must check their excessive ego while handling their team members. They must empathize with their team members before assigning the tasks whether the assigned tasks can be executed effectively with confidence. Additionally, leaders must handle differences among the team members without any prejudice. Remember, the slogan: *Always look at what is right and wrong, not who is right and wrong.* When you look at who is right or wrong, your heart rules your head leading to ill-feelings among the team members, losing their trust and finally failing as a leader.

Actors, spectators and speed breakers in workplace

You will find three categories of people in the workplace – actors, spectators and speed breakers. Actors are the employees who follow your ideas, insights, principles and philosophies. Speed breakers are the employees who often criticize your leadership style, tools and techniques. And spectators are the employees who oscillate between the actors and the speed breakers without much clarity. One side, actors try to pull spectators into their group and on another side, speed breakers try to pull them into their group. Your role as a leader is to ensure that spectators become actors and follow your principles and philosophies and work in your team as cohesion. You must ensure that these spectators are not influenced and instigated by speed breakers.

Do not compete, collaborate

King Solomon once quoted, "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." With a dynamic global business environment, the permutations and combinations are changing rapidly. Companies are reinventing themselves with the changing business scenario. They are finding that collaboration is better than competition. Every company has its own strengths and weaknesses. The leaders currently capitalize on the strengths of

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competitors by collaborating, rather than competing with them. The truth is that while competition is needed, excessive competition drains a lot of resources and energies. Hence, leaders must consider the current global climate and redesign their strategies in order to collaborate.

Collaboration is the key to effective team building

Helen Keller once remarked, "Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much." It indicates the significance of collaboration, as there is synergy. Collaboration is not something new to mankind. In the olden days, several leaders avoided competition with the strong ones and collaborated for mutual benefit, peace and prosperity. Collaboration involves a win-win situation for all, while competition involves win-lose or lose-win.

The advantage of collaboration is that people share their knowledge, skills, abilities and, above all, ideas to deliver better results. We find more creative solutions for problems as people think differently and present diversified ideas and insights. It adds value to work, thus leading to the best decision or solution. It capitalizes on the strengths of all the people for the collective good.

We find several global researchers and authors collaborating, rather than competing, to provide the best content to the readers. Although it does entail a division of labor and saves time, apart from leveraging diversified competencies, such collaboration pays off for authors and mostly for readers, as the latter receive a manuscript that has been well-edited and proofread. At the workplace, too, we find employees coming together and working to achieve the best outcomes.

Collaboration and leadership

In her 1994 *Harvard Business Review* article "Collaborative advantage," Rosabeth Moss Kanter talks about leaders who recognize that there are critical business relationships "that cannot be controlled by formal systems but require (a) dense web of interpersonal connections […]." When we observe leaders like Andrew Carnegie and Henry Ford, we see that they believed in more collaboration. Presently, the steel giant Lakshmi Niwas Mittal also believes strongly in collaboration. Leaders like Rick Wagoner (who turned General Motors around) were collaborative leaders who believed in hiring the best talent for restructuring the company.

Collaborative leaders have open minds and are free of prejudices. They have the flexibility to accommodate and adjust with realities. They look below the surface and are visionaries. They are good listeners, and above all, they look at the ground realities.

Competition vs collaboration

Competition emphasizes on "who wins," while collaboration involves "we all win." Competition often creates complications, while collaboration creates camaraderie. By nature, people prefer to compete rather than collaborate. There are challenges involved in competition, as well as resources such as time, money and energy. However, when we take a long-term view, we see that it is ideal to work together for the overall benefit of the people and society, rather than involving focussed negative energies to outsmart others. Man, by instinct, is competitive, and has been since primitive times. However, with civilization there is need for a change in the mindset of people, to work in peace for the overall good of the society.

The downside of collaboration is that it keeps people in their comfort zones rather than in effective zones. But when viewed in totality, competition is seen to create ill-will and envy. It does more harm than good. It results in a loss of peace and prosperity. Hence, it is better to go by collaboration than competition.

"Collaborative leaders have open minds and are free of prejudices."

A Creative Center for Leadership study reveals, "Collaboration is critical to success." It further says, "Relationship building ranked tenth out of sixteen leadership competencies"[2]. It indicates the growing importance attached to collaboration. Collaboration is desirable when more damage is being done through competition, and in situations where we can ensure peace, security and productivity of the people. What matters at the end of the day is the value we are adding and the difference we are making in the lives of others. Whether in politics or business, we have to look at the overall prosperity. If the gains are greater and the results concrete, then it is advisable to collaborate rather than compete.

Conclusion

In the ancient days, the slogan *might is right* prevailed. However, in today's world this has been replaced by *just is right*. Similarly, in ancient days competition and the rule of the jungle prevailed. However, in today's world people appreciate collaboration, which is congenial for both growth and prosperity. Hence, it is obvious that what worked in the past no longer works in the present. Henry Ford rightly noted, "Coming together is a beginning, keeping together is progress; working together is success." The twenty-first century is a period of coalition and collaboration. A new mindset must replace competition with collaboration. Mother Teresa rightly quoted, "I can do what you can't do and you can do what I can't do. Together we can do great things." To summarize, identify various personality types of your team members, leverage their strengths, understand their expectations and apply different leadership tools and techniques as per the situation to build an effective team to achieve organizational excellence and effectiveness.

Notes

1. www.amazon.com/The-Platinum-Rule-Discover-Personalities/product-reviews/0446673439?pageNumber=2

2. www.cio.com/article/152451/Great_Leaders_Build_Off_Great_Relationships

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Further reading

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