Making Teams Work Essay, Research Paper

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The importance of teams is becoming more and more apparent in today’s dynamic business world. Increasingly managers are searching for a means to improve production and keep their organization competitive in the global market. A lot of these managers have turned to the team as a means for achieving this improvement. Quality circles were originally looked at to fulfill this role, however they are being phased out in favor of self-managed work teams. These teams are increasingly being used to solve many of today’s organizations production problems and inefficiencies, and in the process are both badly failing and greatly succeeding. So the discussion of teams is a very important one to address. Managers should be aware of the concept of teams and learn about as a means to further their organization and for when the time comes to implement a team they are prepared with the knowledge needed to build and use a team properly.

The basic interpretation of a team is “a collection of two or more individuals who interact with each other, share common beliefs, and perceive themselves as being a group.” (Denton ‘92) Metropolitan Life Insurance Company defines a team fore specifically as “a group of people with specific roles and responsibilities, organized to work together towards common goals or objectives, in which each member depends on others to carry out responsibilities to reach those goals and objectives.” (Denton) The implementation and operation of a team can either be a great success or a costly failure, both money wise and time wise. Many companies have benefited from teams, and “when teams work, there’s nothing like them for turbocharging productivity.” (Denton “94) There are many examples of successful implementation of teams: Federal Express and IDS boosted productivity by 40% and Boeing cut its engineering hang-ups on its new 777 passenger jet by more than half. The Ford Motor Company also has had great success with teams when producing the new Mustang prototype. Ford produced the Mustang from design concept to the finished product under budget and in record time. (Dumaine)

However, many companies and managers are put off by the very mention of the work team. Some people see teams as just another management fad, while others in management have had bad experiences with teams that have failed. As Magee points out, “ill-functioning teams can cause disastrous effects on the individuals involved, the organization’s service delivery and customer service reputation, and the mood of the entire organization.” (1997;26) So there is little wonder shy many organizations and managers are disillusioned by teams and very cautious to implement them. Evidence of this apprehension could be interpreted from a study conducted by the Center for Effective Organizations at the University of Southern California. The Center conducted a survey of Fortune 1000 companies and found that 68% of them used self-managed work teams. However, only 10% of total workers are involved in such teams. (Dumaine) These results could suggest that most companies are still learning about work teams and are not ready to throw themselves into committing large portions of their workforce to work teams. As organizations and managers hear the success stories of Federal Express, IDS, and Ford, they want to reap the benefits of successful team implementation as well. However, they obviously want to steer clear of the possible problems and costs that unsuccessful team implementation can produce.

Although all teams require maintenance and costs, they can be fine-tuned to keep these costs to a minimum, which will also maximize the team’s success. One way to do this is with planning. Failure to adequately plan and study for the team building process can get your very expensive team into trouble. This could lead to an unfavorable beginning for the team, which may sabotage the team in the long run and end up costing you a lot of money. In the planning process, team composition and the type of team to be used should be examined. Team composition is about choosing the right people for the right job and is very important to team success. The type of team should also be carefully chosen because, as Dumaine (1994; 86) points out, “the most common trouble with teams is that many companies rush out and form the wrong kind for the job.” The most common types of teams are management teams, work teams, virtual teams, quality circles, and problem-solving teams. By classifying the teams and their roles, a company can ensure that the correct team is chosen, with the right selection of employees, which will increase the likelihood of the success of the team.

Another important factor of team building is the establishment of a team mission. A team mission gives you a foundation on which to build, operate and plan for the future. The development of a team mission is therefore an important component to consider when team building. Denton (1992; 88) suggests that the defining of the team’s mission will then lead to clarification of member’s roles. Each member of the team should know exactly what role he or she is to play, and only when these roles are clear does the team achieve goals. Role clarification will also ensure that the workload is evenly spread among the team members so that no one person is over burdened.

Leadership is also a very important component of any team. Team leadership can affect the team’s performance and solidarity. To keep these two things to a maximum, Denton (1992) suggests that leaders should be able to deep the team on track and that high cohesiveness results when leaders were supportive of positive group dynamics and treated the group as a team. A good team leader will go a long way towards unifying the team and helping members work well together.

While there are many factors that must all come together to build a successful team, it can be done with proper planning and support from upper management. They must also discuss how to set up the compensation for the team, evaluation of team performance, and of individual performance. In my opinion, the benefits of increased productivity and efficiency that are seen by the organizations that properly build and successfully implement teams, far out-weigh the risks and costs of a team that fails. I would have to say that in today’s competitive, globally oriented organizations, we cannot over stress the importance of teams. It seems that how much you get out of a team depends on how much you are willing to put into it, and most of what you need to put into it is some time spent doing the homework planning necessary to build the team that will take your business to the top.

1. Denton, D.D. (1992) Building a team. Quality Progress, October, 87-91.

2. Dumaine, B. (1994) The Trouble with Teams. Fortune, 130.

3. Magee, Y.S. (1997) Teams: avoiding the pitfalls. Public Management, 79.

4. McGarvey, R. (1996) Joining forces: 12 steps to creating winning teams. Entrepreneur, 24