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**OUR PAST PRESENT, AND FUTURE IN
TEAMS: THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCE
PROFESSIONALS IN MANAGING TEAM
PERFORMANCE ACROSS CULTURES**

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**Our Past, Present, and Future in Teams:
The Role of Human Resource Professionals in Managing Team Performance**

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The majority of Fortune 1000 employees have been affected by the widespread proliferation of work teams. This holds true also for the millions of employees and managers who work outside the Fortune 1000. Recent evidence about the growth in work teams reinforces the notion that teams have become a way of life in many organizations (Osterman, 1994; Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1995). For example, Osterman (1994) found that over 50 percent of the 700 firms he studied were using teams and that over 40 percent had more than half of their employees working in teams. With the use of teams continuing to grow, human resources professionals need more knowledge about teams in general and, more specifically, information about the human resources practices that enhance team performance. Human resources are critical for the development and implementation of organizational strategies and structures. Successful HR professionals will be those who can align their organizational HR practices with the unique demands of team-based organizational structures.

In this chapter, we have four objectives. First, we provide human resource professionals with a brief history about the use of teams in the United States. We review definitions and types of teams, evidence regarding the impact of teams, and the factors which led to the proliferation of teams. Second, we aim to provide the human resource professional with tools to increase the effectiveness of teams. We discuss the key assumptions that must be adapted to create supportive conditions for teams. Third, we review modifications in human resource practices that are necessary to effectively implement teams. Finally, we discuss potential challenges that human resource practitioners may face in implementing teams in multinational organizations. Looking to the future, we present guidelines for meeting these challenges. We conclude with some predictions regarding the prospective use of teams that will likely develop as our team-based organizations continue to evolve.

What Teams Are, Why Now, How Teams Contribute, and When to Use Them

In general, a work team can be defined as a group of individuals working interdependently to solve problems or accomplish tasks (Manz & Sims, 1993; Sundstrom, De Meuse, & Futrell, 1990). However, a single definition is not sufficient to capture the key differences that exist between the various types of teams being used in organizations. Table 1 shows the most common types of work teams and their key characteristics and differences.

Insert Table 1 about here

A number of key differences between these types of teams will determine the efficacy of human resources practices designed to enhance team effectiveness. For example, compensation structures are normally altered for self-managing work teams to include team-based rewards to encourage cooperation between team members and to motivate members to reach team goals (Gerhart & Milkovich, 1992; Kanin-Lovers & Cameron, 1993). Since self-managing members are working on permanent teams, the effort and expense involved in changing compensation structures is often times justified. However, in more temporary teams like problem solving or cross-functional teams, other types of human resources policy changes (for example, altering an evaluation system to include team behaviors) may be a more appropriate strategy to encourage positive team behaviors. Our point here is not to review all of the appropriate human resources policies for each type of team (see Cohen & Bailey, 1997, for a good review), but to acknowledge that our use of the words “work team” implies several different types of teams.

Contrary to popular beliefs, teams are not a “new” phenomenon. The origins of teams can be traced to the Tavistock studies of post World War II (Trist & Bamforth, 1951) and to the Swedish socio-technical movement generally associated with the Volvo Corporation (Pasmore, 1995). The first work teams in the United States were found in the Procter & Gamble Company in the early 1960s, the Topeka work system at a General Foods pet food plant in the late 1960s (Walton, 1972), and in the Rushton Quality of Work Project in Pennsylvania in the mid-1970s (Goodman, 1979). Given that teams were identified as a mechanism for improving employee performance as early as the 1960s, why has it taken over 30 years to implement work teams on a large scale in the United States?

We attribute the recent rise in the interest and use of work teams over the last 10 years to three factors: (1) a higher concern for the social component of work; (2) the globalization of the U.S. economy and resulting downsizing; and (3) the early adoption of work teams by highly visible companies such as General Motors, AT&T, General Electric, Xerox, and Motorola. While many believe that organizations have adopted work teams to improve employee morale or productivity, the forces behind team adoption have been much larger in scale and much more connected to global patterns of international business. Organizations have adopted work teams because many of them had no choice. Dramatically reduced numbers of managers could not keep up with employee activities on a day-to-day basis.

Furthermore, the increase in the use teams can be attributed, in part, to evidence for their success. Work teams have been associated with higher levels of productivity (Banker, Field, Schroeder, & Sinha, 1996; Cohen & Ledford, 1994); quality (Banker and others, 1996; Cohen & Ledford, 1994, Wellins and others, 1990); customer

satisfaction (Wellins and others, 1990); safety (Cohen & Ledford, 1994); job satisfaction (Cordery, Mueller, & Smith, 1991; Wall, Kemp, Jackson, & Clegg, 1986); and organizational commitment (Cordery and others, 1991). It should be noted, however, that most of these studies have been conducted with self-managing work teams. For traditional work teams, much of the evidence for impact has been collected on a case-by-case basis. Wellins, Byham, and Dixon (1990), for example, chronicle the pervasive positive impact teams have had in twenty companies. These companies claim that implementing teams resulted in improvements in bottom line indicators such as cost savings, quality and service improvement, speed, absenteeism, and turnover.

This is not to say that teams are a panacea. Several studies regarding the impact of teams have failed to find effects for performance on more quantitative measures such as productivity (for example, see Wall and others, 1986); other studies report only modest findings for productivity (see Goodman and others, 1988). Smaller effect sizes for productivity may be due to using work teams in contexts where they are not appropriate. Clearly, work teams are not ideal for every task (Even if you have a hammer, not every problem is a nail). Work teams are more effective under the right circumstances and situations.

For example, work teams are most effective when there is high task interdependence, or a high degree of coordination and collaboration required between team members to accomplish tasks (Shea & Guzzo, 1987). Thus, taking a group of insurance sales agents who are geographically dispersed and have little interaction with each other to carry out their tasks would most likely be an inappropriate context in which to implement teams. The agents would likely see such an effort as an empty, poorly developed strategy designed to capitalize on a management fad.

Work teams are also more appropriate when the tasks that members carry out are complex and well designed (Cordery, Wall, & Wright, 1997). If a group's work is routine and unchallenging, of dubious importance, and wholly preprogrammed with no opportunity for feedback, teams will probably not make much difference in productivity (Hackman, 1987: 325). As Johns (1996) has stated, "Taking a bunch of olive stuffers on a food processing assembly line, putting them in distinctive jumpsuits, calling them the Olive Squad, and telling them to self-manage will be unlikely to yield dividends in terms of effort expended or brainpower employed" (p. 257). Work teams, especially those that increase autonomy and responsibility, are most effective when members are given complex tasks that capitalize on the diverse knowledge and skills of a team. Thus, teams should view their tasks as significant, the tasks

should require the use of a variety of skills, and members should, where possible, assemble an entire product or deliver a complete service.

The effectiveness of work teams also depends on whether an organization has high integration needs due to its operating in a complex environment (Mohrman, Cohen, & Mohrman, 1995). Complex environments typically force organizations to serve a wide variety of customers, deal with rapidly changing technology, and satisfy large numbers of different stakeholders. IBM, for example, faces a much more complex environment than McDonalds (for example, compare the rate of change of PCs versus Big Macs over the last 15 years). Organizations must simultaneously deal with all of these issues (in other words, differentiate into smaller more responsive units) and then integrate these widely dispersed efforts and units back into one cohesive organization. Teams will be most effective when a team structure is the best solution to obtaining the *integration* required to accomplish goals in a complex organizational environment (Mohrman and others, 1995). Without effective integration, the benefits attributed to work teams (increased productivity, higher quality, better job satisfaction) will be realized.

Thus, companies implementing teams from a “bandwagon” perspective will not realize the potential benefits to be had from an appropriate fit between teams and work context. In fact, many organizations are currently struggling with team effectiveness. We argue that this is due in part to traditional assumptions about work that still prevail. In order to effectively implement teams, a change in assumptions must occur. We next discuss these adaptations.

Adapting Our Assumptions

We discuss the assumptions that shaped the decisions made by human resources professionals in traditional hierarchical organizations in three areas: (1) motivation, (2) the structure of work; and (3) accountability. Traditional assumptions must be adapted in order to support effective implementation of teams. These adaptations are summarized in Table 2. As we discuss each area of assumptions, we elaborate on the necessary adaptations.

Insert Table 2 about here

Motivation

The first set of assumptions that must be examined pertain to motivation. Our national culture helps to determine what motivates us. For example, some cultures can be classified as *individualistic*, or cultures in which people tend to value their own self-interest and welfare over the interests of groups or societies; other cultures are known as *collectivistic*, or cultures in which people tend to value the welfare of groups more than their own welfare (Hofstede, 1980). Individualists are motivated by the opportunity to gain personal recognition. They resist working in teams more than people from collectivistic cultures (Kirkman, 1996; Kirkman & Shapiro, 1997). Such resistance lowers team effectiveness on outcomes such as productivity, job satisfaction, cooperativeness, and organizational commitment (Kirkman, 1996). It will take time and experience for people to adjust their notions of fairness and equity to include collective accountability. Taking a longer term focus and understanding the eventual payoffs for early investments in team-based systems is essential for harnessing the motivational power of teams.

In understanding motivational assumptions, it is also important to consider expectations. Research attests to the importance of collective expectations in determining our level of motivation, and subsequently our performance (Bandura, 1997; Gibson, 1995). When we believe we can accomplish objectives as a team, we are motivated to stick with our work tasks and prevail. However, sometimes these high expectations get out of hand, to the point that teams hold unrealistic expectations. Cohesive teams often fall prey to this phenomenon, which is referred to as “groupthink” (Janis, 1982). Coinciding with extremely high expectations, teams suffering from groupthink also hold illusions of invulnerability. Such teams ignore important external information sources which might help them adjust their performance to better fit the needs of customers. Individualistic teams appear to be particularly susceptible to over confidence (Gibson, 1996). This may be because individualists view their team as an entity in and of itself, rather than connected to the external context, and are therefore even less apt to utilize external sources of information to make corrections in their behavior and improve their performance. Particularly in individualistic cultures, team-based organizations need to have systems that help teams set realistic expectations. This allows teams to stay motivated, while at the same time open to learning from feedback and mistakes.

Work Structure

Beyond motivation, a second domain of assumptions concerns the structure of work. Traditional work groups were generally formed around common technical or functional skills and areas of expertise (for example, accounting, finance, or production). In recent years, it has become apparent that organizing work around a process

(for example, new product development), rather than around a specific task or function is more effective (Dunphy & Bryant, 1996). Doing so often requires extending team members' task skills. Multiskilled teamwork involves teams made up of individuals with multiple and overlapping skills that are deployed around the performance of a whole task which represents a significant part of a larger work flow. Members are multiskilled so that work can be flexibly allocated among them.

In organizing work around processes, organizational boundaries must often be re-negotiated. Increasingly, work teams have external customers and suppliers as members. For example, General Electric Medical Systems invites representatives from leading HMO's to serve on their sales and service teams. The American Red Cross has members of the communities serving on key committees that set organizational objectives. Eastman Kodak allies itself with key competitors to form market segment task forces. These types of work structures require a whole new notion of collaboration - collaboration with external constituencies. Those who were previously viewed as "them" are now viewed as "us."

The re-organization of work around processes and across boundaries has numerous benefits. For example, multiskilling (the learning of new skills in addition to functional expertise) can result in reduced staffing as fewer workers can perform the same range of tasks. It can create efficiencies through more flexible task assignment. Multiskilling also often leads to lower inventories due to more effective workflow coordination. It also makes the team more flexible in meeting fluctuating market demand through operational flexibility. Finally, it can lead to a more differentiated response to the needs of particular customer segments and so contribute to strategic flexibility. Multiskilling leads to greater awareness of the whole task and enables the team member to take part in problem solving, innovation, and strategic thinking (Dunphy & Bryant, 1996). These same benefits do not accrue when tasks and organizations are structured under traditional assumptions of static, independent jobs.

Accountability

A third domain of assumptions that shape team effectiveness pertain to accountability. The focus of the majority of human resource departments has been on the individual. Individual accountability and responsibility have been the foundation on which all of the business practices in the United States have been built. Furthermore, accountability in traditional work organizations was vested in those with formal position – the managers and supervisors. Individual employees showed deference to people in these positions. Reporting structures were

vertical and a command-and-control philosophy reigned. Skills such as planning, coordinating, personnel functions, quality management, health and safety, and boundary management were the domain of managers.

Increasingly, these duties are becoming the domain of teams. Managerial responsibility is shifting from individual accountability to collective, mutual accountability. As this has occurred, the notion of "self-management" has gained acceptance. Self-management takes place as the team's operational tasks are delegated to the team itself. Many different terms have evolved to describe and distinguish varying degrees of autonomy. These include self-directed work teams (Osburn and others, 1990); empowered teams (Lawler, 1986; Wellins, Byham, & Wilson, 1991), self-leading teams (Manz & Sims, 1987), and superior work teams (Kinlaw, 1991). The common distinguishing characteristics of such teams is that they operate with some degree of autonomy.

As nonmanagers become collectively responsible for managerial duties, basic assumptions about the legitimacy of authority are challenged. Team members may begin to question what gives peers the right to set rules for other peers. They may have difficulty dealing with authority that does not stem from positions. Rather than depending upon a job description and direction from the manager, people work jointly with co-workers to determine what they do. Because personal success is dependent upon collective success, an individual's fate is tied to co-workers. Feelings of mutual trust and partnership must develop. The organization must help people learn to deal with greater degrees of ambiguity, uncertainty, continual change, and collaborative relationships. Both managers and employees in the team-based organization need to adjust to this shift in accountability and responsibility. We discuss the human resource systems that increase team effectiveness in our next section.

Modifying HR Practices to Support Teams

Beyond recognizing and adapting our assumptions, human resource practices must also be modified to support teams. Modifications cluster in five areas: (1) recruitment and selection, (2) task design, (3) training, (4) evaluation, and (5) compensation. Below, we summarize the modifications and provide references for practitioners interested in exploring the modifications in greater depth. An overview of the modifications is presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

Recruitment and Selection

Working effectively on teams requires a particular set of knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) that were not as critical in traditional organizations. These include proficiency in at least five areas: conflict resolution, collaborative problem solving, communication, goal setting and managing performance, and planning and task coordination (Klimoski & Jones, 1995). During recruiting, organizations aspiring to create a workforce of effective team members should clearly communicate the importance of these requirements. Doing so provides a realistic job preview and can therefore help to reduce turnover (Wanous, 1989). Recruiting individuals who prefer these activities also makes sense because team members' preferences for teamwork are related to team effectiveness (Kirkman & Shapiro, 1997).

Beyond recruiting, it is important to consider teamwork KSAs in the selection process. It might seem easy to include measures of KSAs in most selection systems. However, most selection instruments focus on basic learning abilities (for example, math, language, perceptual skills) or specific technical abilities (for example, mechanical, electrical, etc.). In the last few years, employment tests designed to measure teamwork KSAs have been under development. Early results suggest that these tests are able to predict subsequent performance beyond the level of prediction from a large battery of traditional employment aptitude tests (Stevens & Campion, 1994). These initial findings provide encouraging support for such instruments. Interviews might also be a viable method of assessing social and interpersonal attributes that contribute to teamwork. There is evidence that a structured interview designed to measure social KSAs can predict future team effectiveness (Campion, Campion & Hudson, 1993). Finally, selection techniques that involve collection of biographical information may be another way to assess teamwork KSAs.

Task Design

The second set of practices that must be modified pertain to task design. Effective teams are designed around the tasks they perform. Two key considerations are that teams should be relatively self-contained and should handle many aspects of their own functioning. First, teams should be collectively responsible for an identifiable and substantial part of the work of the organization. To the extent possible, support services should be included in the team so that it has the resources necessary to accomplish its goals. Members should be multiskilled and dedicated to the team so that they do not have to split priorities. Finally, the team should report as a unit so that members do not have conflicting directions from different managers (Mohrman and others, 1995).

Second, the team should be responsible for many aspects of their own functioning. For example, they should be able to determine how to apply the team's resources, the strategies for completion of work, and monitoring quality. They should also be responsible for working with internal and external customers. Finally, part of the team's task should include performance evaluation. Whenever appropriate skill levels and task conditions exist, team members should be involved in reviewing their own performance and determining their own rewards (Wellins and others, 1991; Zingheim & Schuster, 1997).

Beyond these two fundamental design principles, a third issue is whether teams should be functional or cross-functional. Functional organizations group people by common specialties and break work down into functional packets that translate into individual assignment. Project organizations combine different specialties required to perform the entire project but then break the work down for members of functional groups within the project. Team-based organizations require a shift away from a hierarchical breakdown to instead focus on the lateral distribution and integration of work (Mohrman and others, 1995).

Choosing between whether teams should be functional or cross-functional should be based on an analysis of the work to be accomplished. Process analysis can be used to determine the sets of activities that have to be conducted and integrated to deliver value to customers (Davenport, 1993). If within an identifiable set of activities, coordination must occur across different functional areas, then teams should be cross-functional in nature. In the cross-functional teams members can integrate work across disciplines and can make trade-offs that require a multidisciplinary perspective. If, on the other hand, the process analysis indicates that an identifiable set of activities occurs within a functional area, then teams should be functional.

Training

Training constitutes a third set of practice modifications for effective team implementation. There is often a mistaken belief that people who are highly educated have the basic skills to work effectively in team settings. In fact, highly specialized individuals are often used to working as individuals and may lack some of the basic interpersonal skills necessary for collaboration. Training programs designed for interpersonal skills in teams take one of two approaches: (1) traditional classroom instruction in which a lecturer delivers material about techniques or strategies for working in teams, or (2) creative off site team-building activities in which teams participate in athletic, artistic, or competitive activities unrelated to their actual day-to-day responsibilities. What is generally missing from these

types of training programs is the development of hands-on team capabilities. This development is best accomplished by treating the team as a whole and by applying the training as the team performs its actual tasks (Mohrman and others, 1995). In this way, the value of the training is established in the context of the work that the team does.

In addition to interpersonal skills, training must focus on establishing the skills necessary for self-management. First, considerable attention must be given to the determination of an optimal degree of autonomy. Self-managing teams are an appropriate response to situations where performance can be enhanced by taking decisions closer to the organization's environment (Mohrman and others, 1995). On the other hand, self-management is not appropriate when the team is particularly large, when there is a high degree of functional diversity, or when the team is newly formed (Mohrman and others, 1995). In these situations, the team is faced with a high level of complexity, information processing requirements are extensive, and managerial tasks are particularly challenging. Having an external leader provide direction in these instances can improve team effectiveness. Perhaps the most substantial costs associated with increasing self-direction in teams are associated with the level of training and development needed to ensure that all or most of the members have KSAs required to perform what were previously managerial responsibilities. In addition, on some teams employees are asked to actually carry out the training and development of their fellow members (Manz & Sims, 1993).

A third training focus pertains to learning. In a team-based system, multidirectional learning is required across functions, levels and organizations. This requires norms that are far different from those that prevailed in the traditional organization. For example, learning requires the willingness to surface bad news and act on it. This norm will not emerge unless past norms of negatively evaluating the messengers of bad news are changed. Organizations that encourage norms of experimentation and innovation and set up mechanisms for shared reflection can capitalize on this learning potential (Mohrman and others, 1995). Lateral learning must occur through dialogue and collaboration and vertical learning must occur between teams at different levels in the organization. Local learning and innovation occurs from trial and error, but broader learning depends upon whether organizations establish mechanisms for reflecting upon and capturing learnings from a variety of experiences.

Evaluation

A fourth set of practices that must be modified pertains to evaluation. If organizations wish to motivate teamwork, they must incorporate teamwork KSAs into their appraisal systems. It is important that the appraisal

system not only reward good team players, but also punish those behaviors that are not conducive to team effectiveness. An organization-specific job analysis should be conducted to determine the precise nature of the behavioral and performance measures to be included in the appraisal form for each individual team member.

Categories of teamwork KSAs such as conflict resolution, collaborative problem solving, communication, goal setting, performance management, planning and task coordination could be translated into critical work behaviors or performance dimensions and incorporated into such an appraisal form (Stevens & Campion, 1994).

Equally important, however, is that team behaviors then be assessed. Imagine four teams, each performing the same task. In one team, you gave each team member an individual goal. In the second, you only set a goal for the team as a whole. The third team was given both individual and team goals. The fourth was given no specific goal at all. Which team would perform the worst? In an experiment that replicated this situation, the team with *individual goals only performed the worst* of all four teams. The team with both individual and team goals performed the best (Mitchell & Silver, 1990). Most organizations might claim they have both individual and team goals if they have profit sharing or gain sharing. However, psychologically, these types of “team goals” are often overshadowed by individual goals. This is because the personal sense of control over performance lessens as one focuses on larger and larger groups, such as the entire organization.

Each team should identify a set of critical measures. These measures should represent a combination of results and process-oriented outcomes. Focusing only on results (for example, return on sales, revenue growth, etc.) does not help inform the team which behaviors should be adjusted. Process measures (for example, time spent per call, days before call returned, etc.) identify key behaviors that the team can change in order to improve results. Teams should avoid developing too many measures. If a measure is not critical in guiding the team’s behavior, then discard it. Most experts recommend teams track six to ten performance areas (Meyer, 1994). Finally, in team-based organizations, people are responsible for collective performance at multiple levels. Individual, team and business unit performance must be evaluated. Optimizing performance at any one level may hurt performance at other levels. The link between behavior at one level and performance at another may be uncertain. People are often concerned that they will not get adequate feedback on how they are performing when the focus is on collective performance. Therefore, appraisal systems should assess behaviors that contribute to performance of other units or other levels within the organization.

Team members should receive feedback from multiple sources, not just a manager. In small teams, each person can receive feedback from all other team members (peer feedback) (Saavedra & Kwun, 1993) and where appropriate, from customers. Customers can be external to the organization (for example, a person who purchases a product or service) or internal to the organization (for example, a person downstream in the process who receives the work of the team). It is also critical that feedback be obtained at multiple levels. Feedback should be provided on individual performance, individual contributions to the team, team performance, and the team's contribution to the organization as a whole. Especially for the latter, feedback from customers and about competitors is critical. Whenever possible, it is best for teams themselves to document their own performance. This documentation should be developed and then discussed regularly at team meetings.

Compensation

A final set of human resource practices that should be examined when implementing teams pertains to compensation. Good practices for rewarding team performance require good processes for defining what the performance should be and for measuring and evaluating the performance (Kanin-Lovers & Cameron, 1993). Some researchers have advocated that rewards should be the last component put in place in the transition to teams (for example, see Mohrman and others, 1995). This argument is made because team rewards are difficult to develop and have to be tailored to the organization.

We recommend that organizations begin by introducing teamwork as a central objective in each individual's performance evaluation. Individual compensation should then be based on the accomplishment of these objectives. This is an intermediary step in the path toward team-based rewards, it allows recognition for teamwork, and allows time for the organization to adjust other systems (Harrington-Mackin, 1994). Next, human resource professionals can work to change the organizational compensation and reward practices. For example, team awards and team bonuses help team members focus on the performance of their own team. Profit sharing and gainsharing help team members focus on unit wide performance. These orient employees to the larger performing unit by making it everyone's interest to improve the performance of the enterprise as a whole.

We argue that the most effective compensation systems will incorporate an element of all three of the above approaches (individual rewards, team rewards, and unit rewards). This combination ensures that performance at each

of these levels is recognized and encouraged, thus ensuring that individual behavior is in the best interest of the team, and team behavior is in the best interest of the organization.

Impediments, Facilitators, and Challenges for the Future of Work Teams

In addition to the challenges in assumptions and HR policy changes necessary to effectively transition to work teams, there are several additional impediments that human resources professionals may face in maintaining and spreading work teams throughout entire multinational organizations. We see these challenges as four-fold: (1) the inability of work teams to dramatically improve organizational performance quickly; (2) the inevitable inter-team conflict inherent in team-based organizations; (3) resistance to work teams in foreign affiliates; and (4) North American cultural barriers to working in teams. In this section, we first discuss these impediments and then provide guidelines for facing the challenges ahead.

Impediments

Time lag. The first stumbling block to the further proliferation of work teams in organizations is the time lag that exists between the implementation of teams and the positive results on productivity and employee morale. As with most large-scale organizational changes, when teams are implemented things get worse before they get better. Most organizations will experience a drop in employee productivity and morale and increases in absenteeism and turnover initially after implementing teams (Cordery and others, 1991; Manz & Sims, 1993; Wall and others, 1986). This time lag between implementation and positive results is problematic for two reasons. First, it is still common business practice in the United States to focus on quarterly results. Such a focus may cause extreme short-term disappointment in top managers looking to maximize short-term profitability. Second, because the popular press contains so many positive stories about teams, many top managers are likely to be shocked with the initial drop in organizational performance. After reading the book, *Greatest Team Success Stories* (a made up title but probably not far off from the real thing!), patience is likely to be thin by the time improvements in productivity or morale are realized. What human resources professionals need here is to arm themselves with concrete evidence about what really happens when work teams get implemented. They must convince top managers that work teams will not be an overnight success. In fact, many leading researchers have suggested that three to five years is not an unreasonable time frame for work teams to be fully and successfully implemented (Manz & Sims, 1993; Mohrman and others, 1995).

Patience from top management is the key, and the challenge to instill this patience falls squarely on the shoulders of human resources professionals.

Inward focus. The second likely impediment of successful work teams is a naturally occurring phenomenon frequently seen at sporting events and other team competitions. When individuals are divided up, given team names, granted a set of distinct responsibilities, and told to perform well as a team, they naturally tend to become more inwardly focused and more concerned about their own team than other teams. Players on football teams shout insults, hockey teams engage in brawls, and work teams occasionally place their own interests above the interest of other teams and, sometimes, above those of the organization. Such inter-team conflict could result in lack of cooperation, refusal to assist other teams in need, or worse, outright sabotage of other teams' efforts. In other words, too much team commitment can be a bad thing. An unwillingness to communicate between teams destroys one of the reasons that organizations implement teams in the first place – to create a higher level of integration in the face of a complex organizational environment. Inwardly focused teams that seldom collaborate with other teams or communicate with external customers perform more poorly than externally focused teams (Ancona, 1990).

There are several strategies available to the human resource professional for overcoming problematic inwardly focused teams. First, managers should keep their teams focused on a higher level, or superordinate, goal. Such a goal can be organization-, plant-, or unit-wide. A superordinate goal keeps teams focused on the big picture, lowers competition between teams, and ties everything that teams do more closely to overall organizational success. A second strategy, which is an extension of the first, may be to implement rewards that are tied to the success of a set of teams as whole (a work unit, for example). Unit level rewards are tricky in that to be effective all team members have to know how their contribution affects the obtaining of the rewards (also known as line of sight). A final strategy is to create linking or integrating teams composed of members from each of the potentially competitive teams. Integrating teams tend to dilute original team members loyalties and provide an organized way for each team to get its concerns heard (Mohrman and others, 1995).

Regardless of the strategy chosen, ignoring the problem of combative teams will inevitably erode any potential gains to be realized from the implementation of work teams. Human resource professionals should take a proactive stand by designing strategies to reduce competition *before* the teams are allowed to become inwardly focused.

Resistance. Third, regarding resistance to teams in other countries, many multinational organizations currently use work teams in their foreign affiliates. Organizations often wish to “export” their management practices because similar human resources practices in each country streamline operations and reduce costs (Earley and Erez, 1997). For example, the Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company has begun using work teams in Europe, Latin America, and Asia; the Sara Lee Corporation currently uses teams in Puerto Rico and Mexico; and Texas Instruments Malaysia has its entire workforce in work teams (Manz & Sims, 1993; Kirkman & Shapiro, 1997).

Organizational scholars have pointed to the role of national culture in determining the success or failure of management initiatives that are developed in one culture and implemented in another (Adler, 1997; Hofstede, 1980; Erez & Earley, 1993). Some employees may resist management initiatives or react angrily when those initiatives clash with their deeply held cultural values (Adler, 1997). Human resources professionals charged with implementing work teams in a number of foreign affiliates should learn about the cultures in which those work teams will be operating. Through a better understanding of cultural differences comes the knowledge of potential stumbling blocks to successful implementation *before* attempts are made to export work teams. Success stories surrounding the use of work teams in foreign affiliates exist (Manz & Sims, 1993), but this success depends on a key understanding of the cultural forces that shape employee reaction to teams.

Values. A final potential impediment to the success of work teams is the differences in employee preferences and values within the United States. Just as some cultures are more individualistic or collectivistic, individuals *within* cultures also vary on this dimension even though there is, on average, more variation across cultures than within cultures (Hofstede, 1980). For example, when faced with the prospect of moving to a team-based work environment, some employees in a study conducted in the United States expressed concern that reflected their individualistic values (Kirkman, Shapiro, Novelli, & Brett, 1996). Respondent comments included: “Why should someone else’s performance affect my pay?”; “Will the team get credit for what I do?”; “Individual achievement won’t count anymore.”; and “My achievement will be diluted by overall team success.” (p. 56).

The comments above suggest that some employees may resist work teams because teams are not compatible with their work-related values, in this case, individualism. Psychometric instruments exist for measuring individualism and collectivism at the individual level (Maznevski & DiStefano, 1995). Other measures such as preference for teams (Campion, Medsker, & Higgs, 1993) could be used as selection tools to evaluate prospective

team members *before* they are placed on a team. If the teams are self-managing or autonomous, measures such as need for growth (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) or need for achievement (McClelland, 1985) could be used to assess prospective team member preferences for increased autonomy and responsibility. Whatever the measures used, human resources professionals need to be aware of the role of individual differences in the success or failure of teams in order to more carefully select those individuals who are more suited to working in a team. Barring the availability of these individuals, training must be utilized to enhance employee receptivity to work teams.

Facilitators

In opposition to the impediments facing the further proliferation of work teams, we see three forces that will continue to enhance the use of teams: (1) the sharing of business practices across organizational units and across different organizations; (2) organizational environment trends; and (3) cultural change.

First, in the years that total quality management enjoyed its heyday (1980s), many companies began a practice that had previously seemed contradictory to maintaining competitive advantage: the benchmarking of human resources practices with other organizations. Whereas in years past companies viewed their internal operations as sources of extreme value, the growth in international competition, especially in automobiles, electronics, and textiles, some businesses in the U.S. have realized the benefits of sharing information more openly to increase the global competitiveness of their entire industry. This realization, coupled with the coverage of work team success stories by the popular press, has fueled an unprecedented exchange of ideas and site visits among companies and even competitors interested in adopting or improving work teams. For example, companies such as General Electric have looked to other seemingly unrelated businesses, such as Southwest Airlines, in order to adapt team-based practices. The benchmarking of human resources practices even occurs within industries. Several major semiconductor manufacturers (for example, Intel, DEC, Texas Instruments) have benchmarking agreements that allow for information exchange around human resources best practices (Johns, 1996). We have also observed that Internet list servers devoted to spreading knowledge about work teams among practitioners are bombarded by requests from company officials looking to benchmark team practices across the country. Increased sharing of business practices among companies is sure to increase the use of work teams in organizations for years to come.

Second, in many industries, organizational environments are becoming exceedingly dynamic and complex. Scholars and practitioners alike have long realized the importance of aligning organizational structures with

environmental characteristics (Cummings, 1978; 1982). For example, the rapid changes witnessed in the computer industry forced companies such as IBM to restructure themselves to achieve a better organizational structure-environment fit. Many companies have turned to work teams as one answer to environmental demands for greater responsiveness and flexibility. There is general consensus that increasing environmental complexity will continue for the foreseeable future for organizations in many industries (Jones, 1995). Thus, the use of work teams in providing an integrated and more responsive connection to organizational environments should be on the increase as well.

Finally, regarding cultural change, researchers have suggested that there may be a substantial amount of cross-national convergence of management practices, values and beliefs as a result of the interactions between organizations across cultures (Ralston, Gustafson, Elsass, Cheung, & Terpstra, 1992). For example, responses gathered from Hong Kong managers often reflect more Western values than do responses of Chinese managers and more Eastern values than do responses of American managers (House, Wright, & Aditya, 1997). This implies cultural convergence as a result of Hong Kong managers' exposure to both Western and Eastern societies. In a similar vein, historical analysis indicates that management practices in Korea and Taiwan have become more similar to Japanese practices in the preceding decade (Wade, 1990).

As cultural convergence continues, a common set of values and assumptions may develop across national boundaries. This implies that eventually it may be possible to develop a universal set of "best practices" that will be appropriate regardless of the cultural setting (Teagarden and others, 1995). In other words, less cultural adaptation may be necessary. Thus, human resource practitioners in multinational corporations may gradually have an easier time dealing with cultural impediments. We caution, however, that although some convergence is likely to take place, there are fundamental cultural values within nations that will remain stable. Researchers have referred to this phenomenon as the distinction between peripheral versus core values (House, Wright, & Aditya, 1997; Trompenaars, 1994). Peripheral values may change as a result of exposure to other cultures; however, core beliefs about existence are not likely to change. Therefore, some degree of adaptation of human resource practices to fit the cultural context will always be necessary to enhance the effectiveness of those practices across national boundaries.

The Future of Work Teams

We see the work teams of the 21st Century taking on some new characteristics that are not currently in common practice, but exist in the early adoption phase in the Fortune 1000. First, as environmental complexity

continues to increase, we predict that temporary team structures will supplant the permanent work teams that are found today. As the forces outside organizations continue to change, the structures inside organizations will take on a more fluid character. Rather than having people permanently assigned to work teams, team composition will shift as projects, problems, or customers demand. Ad-hoc teams or project teams will be more prevalent, placing extraordinary demands on employees to be flexible and to demonstrate their value to organizations consistently through their team efforts. Perhaps such structures will signal the end of the job as we have known it and usher in the age of the skill set (a combination of skills and talents) as the predominant unit of work. The challenge for human resources managers will certainly involve compensation and evaluation issues for employees who may be constantly moving from one project team to another without a constant supervisor or team members with whom the employee has any long-term contact.

Second, the use of multicultural teams (teams composed of members from different cultures) and globalized teams (teams composed of same-culture members in a variety of countries) is likely to rise as trade barriers continue to fall (for example, NAFTA and the European Union). National culture plays a strong role in determining employee attitudes and behavior (Adler, 1997). If a significant rise in these more culturally diverse teams occurs (and we feel strongly that it will), then human resources managers must familiarize themselves with the cultures in which their organization operates. For example, if peer evaluations are used as part of the performance appraisal process on a multicultural team, human resources managers must identify the key cultural characteristics that may serve as stumbling blocks to these evaluations. If globalized teams are used, it is likely that entirely different compensation systems will be needed depending on the dominant cultural values of the areas in which an organization has business.

Finally, with more telecommuting and flex time schedules, there will be less face-to-face time in work teams. We predict that traditional work teams will be replaced by virtual teams whose members may seldom or never meet together in person. Also referred to as “mobile,” these teams have no geographic center. Team members work out of their homes, automobiles, and clients’ facilities and communicate via email, fax, telephone, and video-conferencing. Team meetings may take place only once per quarter. The challenge for HR professionals is to assist managers in integrating team members, building cohesive teams, and facilitating communication and information exchange without having team members together in one place.

Conclusion

Teams are a powerful design option for organizations that hope to meet the challenges of increased global competition, improve quality of outputs, and address the social needs of the ever changing global work force.

However, the success or failure of work teams in multinational organizations will depend largely on the role of the human resources professional. Effective implementation of teams requires that human resource practitioners adapt key assumptions regarding motivation, structure, and accountability. Adapted assumptions must support lateral thinking, collaboration, interdependence, a focus on process, permeable boundaries, and mutual responsibility,

Coinciding with adaptations in assumptions, human resource practices must also evolve to support team-based systems. Modifications in recruitment and selection, task design, training, evaluation and compensation are all key to the effective utilization of teams in multinational organizations. Key to effective selection and recruitment for teams is the identification of teamwork knowledge, skills, and abilities. Critical for task design is the development of teams around task processes and the integration of functional areas. Developing interpersonal, managerial, and learning skills are important training needs in team-based organizations. Finally, effective evaluation and compensation for teams requires a multi-level perspective and a balance between individual and team-based systems.

Numerous impediments will challenge the effective implementation of teams across national contexts. These include the inherent time lag between implementation and results, the often tenuous relationships between teams, cultural differences which require adaptations in practices to fit the context, and increasing domestic demographic diversity within nations. To address these potential impediments, human resource practitioners can encourage the sharing of practices within and between organizations, observe and adapt to organizational environmental trends, and maintain awareness of cultural convergence.

Human resource professionals who are able to adapt assumptions and who are adept at modifying basic human resource practices will be better poised to face future trends in the use of teams that lay just on the horizon. As temporary team structures, multicultural teams, and virtual teams proliferate, these team savvy human resource practitioners can lead their organizations through successful implementation and utilization of teams in multinational contexts.

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Table 1. Types of Teams*

Team Type	Typical Work Performed	Task Design	Duration
(1) Self-Managing Work Teams	Day-to-day work activities, including some managerial duties	High autonomy, high task interdependence, work on the team is the job	Permanent
(2) Work Team	Day-to-day work activities	Varies	Permanent
(3) Management Teams	Strategic decision making carried out by top managers	High autonomy, high task interdependence teamwork is the job	Permanent
(4) Cross-functional Teams	Consists of members of different functional areas assigned to carry out work	Autonomy moderate task interdependence, retain functional responsibility	Until project or assignment is complete
(5) Problem Solving/Project Teams	Specific tasks designed to improve work processes or meet specific customer needs	Some autonomy, moderate, task interdependence, retain functional responsibility	Until the project is complete, or problem is solved
(6) Virtual Teams	Made up of members who are geographically dispersed and who seldom meet face-to-face	Extreme autonomy, low to moderate interdependence, retain functional responsibility	Until project is complete

*The types of teams are numbered one to six and indicate the degree to which a team member's time is spent in a team and the lifespan of the team (i.e., 1=all of the member's time is spent in the team and the team is permanent; 6=only some of the member's time is spent in the team and the team is temporary).

Table 2. Adapting Assumptions

Domain	Previous Assumptions	New Assumptions
Motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual motivation • Individualistic values • Competition • Short term focus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group motivation • Collectivistic values • Collaboration • Longer term focus
Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent work • Quantity is important • Narrow job definitions • Strong organizational boundaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdependent work • Processes are important • Multiskilling • Permeable boundaries
Accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual responsibility • Functional specialization • Vertical reporting structures • Command and control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mutual responsibility • Lateral thinking • Horizontal reporting • Self-management

Table 3. Modifying Human Resource Practices

HR Component	Practice Modification
Recruitment and Selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying teamwork knowledge, skills and abilities • Matching people with tasks • Utilizing written, interview, and activity based techniques
Task design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building opportunities for collaboration • Structuring tasks with collaboration in mind • Matching structure with task processes • Building integrating mechanisms
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing interpersonal skills • Nurturing collaboration • Obtaining managerial skills • Learning how to share practices
Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluating teamwork knowledge, skills and abilities • Assessing team performance • Utilizing peer and customer evaluation techniques • Involving team members in evaluation
Compensation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compensating individual contributions to teams • Rewarding teams • Integrating teams through rewards • Assessing culture congruence