

THE ROLE OF TEAMWORK IN ENHANCING INFORMATION SERVICE
PROVISION IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

by

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1.0 WHAT IS A TEAM?

A team may be defined as a group of **competent** individuals who **care deeply** about each other. They are fiercely committed to **their mission**, and are highly motivated to combining their energy and expertise to achieve a **common objective**.

2.0 WHY TEAMWORK?

Most wealth-producing work has become more knowledge-based and requires a variety of backgrounds and expertise to solve problems. Decisions require more factors to be taken into account. Teams are therefore needed to sort information and consider alternative courses of action, even though once alternatives have been examined, and risks weighed, individuals normally take decisions.

Teamwork is always beneficial for organizations as it increase flexibility and speed as task is being done by more than one individual with different skills, effective use of diverse workforce is possible where more innovative ideas and efficient decision making is more probable due to heterogeneity in the team. Provided with the right set of motivation and support a team can increase productivity far more than what can be achieved on individual basis (Robbins & Coulter, 2002)

Although described in various ways the personal qualities most commonly sought by organizations today are a commitment to solving real problems, ability to communicate effectively and ability to work in teams.

Is Teamwork applicable in Academic Institutions of Higher Learning?

In a team-oriented environment, you contribute to the overall success of the organization. You work with fellow members of the organization to produce these results. Even though you have a specific job function and you belong to a specific department, you are unified with other organization members to accomplish the overall objectives. The bigger picture drives your actions; your function exists to serve the bigger picture.

Is Teamwork applicable in Libraries?

Yes, no section of the library can work and survive on its own. If the acquisitions librarian does not acquire information materials then the cataloguing and classification librarian has nothing to process nor does the circulation librarian has anything to lend! Shelving too has to be done in teamwork and partnership. Then we have the shift system of day and night shifts.

3.0 THE ROLES OF THE TEAM MEMBERS

The roles that the members play when taking collective action or making decisions that affect the department may be categorized as follows:

The leader of the team, in this case the Librarian who is also the chairperson of the department. The chair's leadership style more closely mirrored that of a facilitator or a coordinator. For example, rather than set the agenda, the chair should frequently allow other members to place items on the agenda. The chair represented the department to external groups, such as other departments and colleges, and to the central administration and the college. He acted as a liaison, bringing back to the departmental faculty the issues that might concern them. He also played a supportive role for departmental faculty in numerous ways, such as listening to group members' concerns and recognizing and rewarding faculty. Finally, he obtained additional resources for faculty and provided scholarly opportunities for junior faculty.

He should give timely information, bring issues but not solutions to the group, let department members have their say, and represent the department externally. His/her multiple roles may be summarized as communicator, coordinator, recognizer, rewarder, and conflict-resolution person.

The issue raiser, an individual who identified what needed to be discussed by the department as a whole. He or she brought issues to the department for consideration and helped set the collective agenda.

The contesteer, an individual who challenged the department to expand its thinking and consider different perspectives. Contesters saw the value of thorough discussion and were concerned that the group fully consider an issue. Contesters prevented hasty decisions from being made. For example, one faculty member noted, "It seems to me that there are people within the group who like to play roles that kind of make the group slow down and make sure the group considers all of the consequences." Frequently someone playing the role of devil's advocate filled this role. The person saw value in conflict and debate as a way of pushing the group to consider a decision more deeply.

The Synthesizer/harmonizer, the third role, was salient to the group's striving to reach consensus and make decisions by summarizing and synthesizing discussions and pushing for closure. This person also attended to the feelings of group members, helping the department to understand the impact that decisions may have on individuals in the department. According to one member, an individual playing this role "will jump in and summarize the different points, push for consensus, or point out that someone might be upset about the decision."

The historian influenced the collective decision-making process in two different ways. First, he or she added the wisdom of experience to provide a context for decision making. This person explained the rationale for past decisions and upheld group norms. Second, the historian postponed or prevented a decision, slowing down or even derailing the process. The historian sometimes was seen as a roadblock. As one department member said, "Sometimes this emphasis on history becomes a real deterrent to change. . . . It seems to be used as an excuse to continue doing something."

The sideliners, were someone who intentionally was not part of a discussion. This individual might be a sideliner for multiple reasons, such as being new to the faculty or deciding to sit out a decision because of lack of interest in the topic or because of the press of time. For example, one faculty member said that he occasionally "sits back and lets those who really care about the matter at hand hash it out." Another faculty member gave the example of involvement in doctoral student admissions: "We spend a lot of time on it and everyone can participate if they want, but I usually don't participate too much on who gets into the doctoral program because of [the time required]." Over the course of the interviews, I learned that the roles just described were not static and played by only one individual. Rather, different people fulfilled the roles at different times, and not all roles were present in every situation.

4.0 WAYS TO REINFORCE EFFECTIVE TEAMWORK

There are various ways of reinforcing and encouraging staff to work harder and achieve the goals of a department. The following are just but a few tips on how to do that.

- Think about the "One Minute Manager" catch someone doing something good and complement them there and then. Example when someone comes to work earlier than 8am.
- When someone invests effort on a challenging project, give them feedback in such a way that acknowledges the effort and suggests resources and ways to be more effective. Example in the Library setting we have only one staff working night shift and sometimes the staff on duty is too busy even to take time off for a snack or supper. In such a case a special request to the catering department to provide tea and snacks to the Library staff will be appreciated and make the staff more effective.
- Create team incentives that allow peers to recognize one and other. Have an employee of the week, month or year award.
- Praise when appropriate and be specific about the reason for your praise. Remember to be sincere. False praise doesn't work because it gives the staff

wrong impression about their productivity and they do not improve their performance.

- Give praise always in public, but reprimand always in private.
- Provide opportunities for success as an individual and as a team.
- Don't just give feedback, ask for feedback and listen.

5.0 ENSURING EFFECTIVE TEAMWORK IN DEPARTMENTS

It is imperative to first build an effective team and second to motivate them in various monetary and non monetary ways to gain maximum output.

- **Clear goals.** An effective team always have clear team goals that encourage team members to replace priority of individual goals with that of team.
- **Relevant skills.** A team should comprise of people with relevant skills according to the context of goals.
- **Mutual trust** is also imperative among team members and that can be facilitated through open, honest and collaborative organizational culture. Such trust may give rise to unified commitment that is directly linked with high level of intensity to achieve team goals.
- **Good communications and negotiation skills** through which each member can understand each other is also imperative and all these processes should be lead by an effective team leader who can motivate team members even in difficult situations.
- **Team incentives.** Giving group incentive it can have twofold benefits. First, it provides an opportunity for each team member to secure a bonus on the outcome of the whole group. This can push the member to work hard for group achievements. Second, due to common incentive for whole group, it will flourish cooperation instead of competition among team members hence increasing chances of achieving team goals. Eg take a faculty to a trip after successful development of a curriculum of a new program.
- **Individual incentives** Individuals in a team may also be given non monetary motivational incentives such as giving them sense of involvement and empowerment. For instance, if a staff initiated and spearheaded introduction of a course they should be given first priority in teaching the course when it is implemented.

6.0 LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR EFFECTIVE TEAMWORK

How to create effective teams, team work, and team building is a challenge in every organization. Work environments tend to foster rugged individuals working on personal goals for personal gain. Typically, reward, recognition, and pay systems single out the achievements of individual employees.

Appraisal, performance management, and goal setting systems most frequently focus on individual goals and progress, not on team building. Promotions and additional authority are also bestowed on individuals.

Twelve Cs for Team Building

Executives, managers and organization staff members universally explore ways to improve business results and profitability. Many view team-based, horizontal, organization structures as the best design for involving all employees in creating business success.

No matter what you call your team-based improvement effort: continuous improvement, total quality, lean manufacturing or self-directed work teams, you are striving to improve results for customers. Few organizations, however, are totally pleased with the results their team improvement efforts produce. If your team improvement efforts are not living up to your expectations, this self-diagnosing checklist may tell you why. Successful team building, that creates effective, focused work teams, requires attention to each of the following.

- **Clear Expectations:** Has executive leadership clearly communicated its expectations for the team's performance and expected outcomes? Do team members understand why the team was created? Is the organization demonstrating constancy of purpose in supporting the team with resources of people, time and money? Does the work of the team receive sufficient emphasis as a priority in terms of the time, discussion, attention and interest directed its way by executive leaders?
- **Context:** Do team members understand why they are participating on the team? Do they understand how the strategy of using teams will help the organization attain its communicated business goals? Can team members define their team's importance to the accomplishment of corporate goals? Does the team understand where its work fits in the total context of the organization's goals, principles, vision and values?
- **Commitment:** Do team members want to participate on the team? Do team members feel the team mission is important? Are members committed to accomplishing the team mission and expected outcomes? Do team members perceive their service as valuable to the organization and to their own careers? Do team members anticipate recognition for their contributions? Do team members expect

their skills to grow and develop on the team? Are team members excited and challenged by the team opportunity?

- **Competence:** Does the team feel that it has the appropriate people participating? (As an example, in a process improvement, is each step of the process represented on the team?) Does the team feel that its members have the knowledge, skill and capability to address the issues for which the team was formed? If not, does the team have access to the help it needs? Does the team feel it has the resources, strategies and support needed to accomplish its mission?
- **Charter:** Has the team taken its assigned area of responsibility and designed its own mission, vision and strategies to accomplish the mission. Has the team defined and communicated its goals; its anticipated outcomes and contributions; its timelines; and how it will measure both the outcomes of its work and the process the team followed to accomplish their task? Does the leadership team or other coordinating group support what the team has designed?
- **Control:** Does the team have enough freedom and empowerment to feel the ownership necessary to accomplish its charter? At the same time, do team members clearly understand their boundaries? How far may members go in pursuit of solutions? Are limitations (i.e. monetary and time resources) defined at the beginning of the project before the team experiences barriers and rework?

Is the team's reporting relationship and accountability understood by all members of the organization? Has the organization defined the team's authority? To make recommendations? To implement its plan? Is there a defined review process so both the team and the organization are consistently aligned in direction and purpose? Do team members hold each other accountable for project timelines, commitments and results? Does the organization have a plan to increase opportunities for self-management among organization members?

- **Collaboration:** Does the team understand team and group process? Do members understand the stages of group development? Are team members working together effectively interpersonally? Do all team members understand the roles and responsibilities of team members? team leaders? team recorders? Can the team approach problem solving, process improvement, goal setting and measurement jointly? Do team members cooperate to accomplish the team charter? Has the team established group norms or rules of conduct in areas such as conflict resolution, consensus decision making and meeting management? Is the team using an appropriate strategy to accomplish its action plan?
- **Communication:** Are team members clear about the priority of their tasks? Is there an established method for the teams to give feedback and receive honest performance feedback? Does the organization provide important business information regularly? Do the teams understand the complete context for their existence? Do team members communicate clearly and honestly with each other? Do

team members bring diverse opinions to the table? Are necessary conflicts raised and addressed?

- **Creative Innovation:** Is the organization really interested in change? Does it value creative thinking, unique solutions, and new ideas? Does it reward people who take reasonable risks to make improvements? Or does it reward the people who fit in and maintain the status quo? Does it provide the training, education, access to books and films, and field trips necessary to stimulate new thinking?

7.0 BARRIERS TO TEAMWORK

Widely recognized barriers to effective teamwork include the following:

- Lack of sufficient senior management support and commitment;
- Lack of clear vision, goals and objectives;
- Insufficient release time from other duties for team members;
- Failure to recognize and reward group efforts;
- Inadequate training and skills development;
- Unwillingness to allow teams necessary autonomy and decision-making powers;
- Lack of project management skills;
- Political meddling and power politics;
- Lack of team spirit, individuals unwilling to participate;
- Executive impatience and push for short-term results

8.0 MEANS/WAYS OF ENHANCING TEAMWORK IN THE LIBRARY

- Shift system whereby we have day shift and night shift
- Saturday shift.
- Rotation of staff within sections
- Rotations within branch libraries
- Mixing people in terms of their academic levels e.g Library Attendant, Library Assistant, Senior Library Assistant, etc
- Shelving together in rotational schedules

9.0 CONCLUSION

Creating effective teams and team work spirit is a challenge in every organization. Work environments tend to foster rugged individuals working on personal goals for personal gain. Typically, reward, recognition, and pay systems single out the achievements of individual employees. However teamwork is imperative if a library is to offer efficient and effective library services. Librarians therefore have no option but embrace teamwork in order to excel in their activities.

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