

BOOK - REVIEW [I]

Title : THE WISDOM OF TEAMS - 1993
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Publisher : Massachusettes HARWARD
BUSINESS SCHOOL PRESS

INTRODUCTION :

With the change as the only permanent feature of the economic & social scenario, all profit & non-profit organizations have come to realise that the conventional bureaucratic, hierarchical structures & management no longer can sustain the onslaught of forces of change. In designing the conventional management system, the basic assumption is that the wisdom lies only at the top of the hierarchy, while the people down the line in the organization are merely followers.

Those who are in the thick of managing change in any organization know from experience that this structure cannot cope with the problems of major change, without the participation & insight of all people in the organization. There is thus a distinct change towards a shift from such purely hierarchical structure of bureaucracy to getting the work done through teams.

The book under review is the latest to come in the market on this theme of "Team-work".

The book consists of three major parts. Part I deals with "Understanding teams", Part II with "Becoming Teams", Part III with "exploiting potential of the team."

CONTENT OF THE BOOK :

There are in all 12 chapters in the book. Some of the chapters are devoted to describing case studies. The following sections describe briefly the message contained in the remaining chapters.

Chapter I identifies three categories of teams :

i) Teams who recommend, ii) Teams who make things, iii) Teams that manage things. All modern organizations facing major change are described using following key terms : Customer-driven performance; total quality; continuous improvement; innovations; empowerment of the work-force; partnering with suppliers and customers.

Activities required by the organization to achieve all these characteristics, are possible only through team

work; because only teams foster learning & behavioural change in every one in the company, if the teams potential is properly exploited. The word major change implies that many people in the organization have to change their ways-behaviour & values. This requires energizing changes, and the leaders cannot succeed without participation & insight of people across the broad base organization.

Teams perform well because they bring together complementary skills & experience that by definition exceed those of any individual. The teams provide real time problem-solving & initiative. They are flexible & responsive to changing events and demands. Behavioural changes occur more readily in teams.

Chapter 2 describes a case-study of team work in an organization. Chapter 3 explains "Team Basics". A team is defined as consisting of small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable. The complementary skills are : Technical/Functional skills; problem-solving & decision-making skills; interpersonal skills. A common purpose gives the team a direction & help them to locate performance goals & commitment to common approach to achieve those goals, The team members are mutually accountable for the achievement of the goals & purpose. Such mutual accountability requires mutual trust & commitment.

Chapter 4 describes a useful model of "high performance curve" showing degree of performance capability of different categories of teams viz.

working groups, pseudoteam, potential team, real team & high performance teams. The chapter describes the characteristics of each category of teams. Every team can identify itself in one of these categories & locate itself on the performance curve. The concept of performance curve also helps the teams to know the direction for achieving higher level of performance.

Chapter 5 is again a case-study. Chapter 6 indicates the way team can move up the performance curve - from individual to team performance. One must attend i) establishing urgency & direction to teams. ii) select members based on skills & skill potential, not personalities, iii) pay particular attention to first meetings and actions, iv) set some clear rules of behaviour, v) Set and seize upon a few immediate performance oriented tasks & goals; vi) Challenge the group regularly with fresh facts and information vii) Spend lots of time together, viii) exploit the power of positive feedback, recognition & reward.

Chapter 7 devotes space to the characteristics of team-leaders. A team leader puts team performance first & recognizes that he needs help from others; does real work himself; does not believe that he has all answers; encourages teams to be decisive. He maintains a balance between providing guidance & giving up control; making tough decisions & letting others to learn to take decisions. He keeps purpose, goals & approach relevant and meaningful; build commitment & confidence; strengthen mix & levels of skills; managing relations with outsiders; removing obstacles, creating opportunities for others; never blames other and

allow others to fail; never excuse away short falls in team performance.

Chapter 8 deals with ways to overcome obstacles to team work. When team fails to perform, the leaders are advised to i) revisit team-basics; ii) goes for small wins; iii) inject new information & approaches; iv) take advantage of facilitators, or training & v) finally change team members including leader. The change of membership must, however, be carried out carefully.

Chapter 9 is the first chapter in part III - Exploiting the potential. It stresses the importance of performance ethics, which means managerial values & behaviour. Strong performance ethics that every one in the company pursues is common performance results benefiting at least three groups : customer, employees, and share holders. This enhances commitment organizationwide to performance that inspires meaning beyond economics.

Teams must also endeavour to move up the curve by attending to team-basics in a disciplined way.

Chapter 10 describes relationship between teams & major change. The major change is defined by

i) the magnitude of behavioural changes required for company performance & number of people who have to change their behaviour & values.

ii) the degree of readiness or resistance. inherent in the culture of the organization to change.

The behavioural changes required in to-days performance is due to the shift from i) individual accountability to mutual support & joint accountability; ii) division of thinking & doing to expecting everybody to think and do; iii) specialising in one function to

encouraging people to playing multiple roles & work together interchangeably on continuous improvement; iv) relying on management control to all people agreeing to meaningful purpose, shape directions & to learn; v) being content with fair day's pay for a days work to aspiring for personal growth.

The most effective effort by the leadership simultaneously provides i) top-down direction; ii) bottom-up goal achievement & problem-solving actions, & iii) cross-functional systems and process design.

Chapter 11 stresses the need to develop team approach even at the top of the hierarchy. Usually top teams adopt working group approach, because it values individual accountability, individual work-products, feel happy in running the meeting, discuss, decide & delegate. Teams are tougher to form at the top. Yet efforts must be made to breach these tendencies in order to form a team at the top, especially when the organization faces major change, by adopting team basics.

Chapter 12 describes top-management's role in leading the organization to high performance. The most important is to understand that only if key policies favour team formation & performance, will the organization at large consider team opportunities positively. Top teams must, therefore, understand the issues in making the choices between the team and the working group; knowing whether, when and how to help team with the disciplined application of team basics; how to monitor where specific teams are on the performance curve; and distinguish between teams that run things, do things & recommend things.

The chapter proceeds to describe how the top-management should deal with each of the three teams mentioned above

Finally the chapter 12 ends with six characteristics of high performance organization.

- i) Balanced performance results with equal focus on customer, employee, & shareholders
- ii) Clear challenging aspirations
- iii) Committed and focussed leadership
- iv) Energized work force committed to productivity and learning.
- v) Skill based sources of competitive advantage
- vi) Open communication & Knowledge management.

COMMENTS

The world bank assisted projects on 'strengthening Technician Education System in the State' in 18 states in India have already introduced such major changes in the existing technical education system. The two components of this world-bank assisted project in

particular, viz. Quality improvement schemes and Efficiency improvement schemes need major behavioural & value changes in all participants in the technician education system ranging from students through teachers, heads of department, principals to the director of technical examination officials & Board of technical education officials & also the ministry of Education officials.

SBTE, Maharashtra has already introduced team approach in bringing about curriculum reforms through industrial surveys, curriculum design, subject design, preparing instructional materials, examination reforms. Teams are formed at the Boards level, lead centre level, departmental level & classroom level. It is indeed experienced that teams are difficult to form unless all managers know team-basics described in the book.

The book is strongly recommended to all those who teach & manage technical education system. Ultimately it is educational system which will support efforts by the business and industrial organization to face challenges posed by globalisation of business.

P. D. Kulkarni

