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Beyond Success: Achieving Synergy in Teamwork, a Critical Review

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The quality of teamwork plays a key role in determining the quality of an organization's operation and the quality of individuals' experiences as workers. Team success requires synergy; that is, the members' collective output far exceeds their levels of achievement as individuals (Lawford, 2003).

Sadly, synergy is not supported in most modern business schemata, especially among middle and senior managers, because of their inherent desire to achieve individual success. This may be innate, or it may be the result of social conditioning through mentoring, management training programs, or peer pressure. Regardless of its source, managers' drives to progress through the corporate hierarchy do not generally lend themselves to teamwork.

In the subject article, author Ross Lawford (2003) presents detailed information for establishing the synergy necessary to move beyond the team members' capabilities and attain the performance associated with teamwork. He discusses a key concept – the connotation of the word “team”: We are in a world where self-sufficiency, not collaboration and sharing, is the primary skill for success. Competition and dominance are prevalent, although “most people experience a deep (probably unconscious) hunger for relationships and companionship.”

Lawford (2003) recommends several approaches for developing effective teams and techniques to sustain an effective teamwork environment:

1. change assumptions (beliefs and values), especially regarding the nature of power;

2. change unconscious/automatic behavior that derives from the assumptions delineated above in order to “move past the mere functioning as a team to the achievement of synergy”;
3. understand the interconnectedness and interdependence of individual team members: no member of the team may “win” unless all do;
4. create the right environment to support the understanding referenced above (i.e., develop a sense of “*esprit de corps*”);
5. develop a shared approach to visioning, planning, and assuming responsibility;
6. ensure that all team members understand the core values, vision, and goals that serve as the team’s foundation; and,
7. “work to establish and maintain mutual trust” through opportunities for sharing on a personal level.

Noted management theorist Peter Senge’s (1990) definition of learning organizations mirrors Lawford’s description of synergy. Senge describes the learning organization as one made up of teams “where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together”; that is, they develop synergy through their shared experiences.

Lawford (2003) concludes, “In order for a team to be effective, especially if it is to achieve that peak performance called synergy, an investment is required by all team

members and by others with whom the team interacts”. That investment is, simply, personal work toward making radical changes in individual belief systems.

Can individuals subordinate their individual desires and beliefs in favor of the greater success? Probably not. It did not work governmentally for Marx, Lenin, Mao, or Ceaușescu. It does not work in military or most social settings (outside the science-fictional Vulcan culture). It is, however, the natural order of things, as seen in numerous biological and chemical examples. Perhaps it is man’s consciousness that not only sets him apart from other beings, but promotes the need for distinction.

Dozens of self-proclaimed and society-deemed experts have developed methods for teaching individuals to function in efficient, effective teams. Each of them, however, has a desire to reign as the premier authority in the field. That attitude belies the premise on which their systems are based. What of synergy? If the experts are incapable of achieving it, what hope does the average workplace team have?

References

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