Managing a global team: greg james at sun microsystems, inc. essay sample

Business, Leadership

As illustrated in the article, " Managing a Global Team: Greg James at Sun Microsystems, Inc. (A)", managing a global team is an intricate task that requires special and specific skills (Neely & Delong, 2009). Greg James, the Global Manager, at Sun Microsystems is faced with many layers of problems that have manifested with a crisis with HS Holdings. Greg uncovered more serious problems as he traveled across the globe to assess problems with HS Holdings. This predicament is illustrated by his statement to Lawry, one of the Vice Presidents at Sun Microsystems, " the issues are more complex than I realized" (Neely & Delong, p. 4, 2009). He has realized that there are complex interpersonal problems that might have been overlooked, which have impacted daily operations and meeting the goal of the team. Greg, as a leader of this complex team, has to a huge task ahead of him as he needs to assess challenges and dysfunctions of the team, understand his role to resolve the issue, and find solutions to move forward.

There are many challenges this global team is facing that are similar to many other virtual global teams face. First challenge this global team is facing is inability to establish rapport and trust due to the nature of a virtual team. It is crucial for any team to build trust and relationship, but the " relationship function" of a virtual team " is even more critical than in traditional collocated teams" (Hill, 2010, p. 248). This mainly happens because one of top challenges of a virtual team is the inability to read nonverbal cues (Ebrahim et al, 2009). Hill (2010) also emphasizes the importance of virtual team leaders to " read all the personal and contextual nuances in a world of electronic communications" (Hill, 2010, p. 248). Another challenge this team may face is managing conflicts, especially

interpersonal relationships. Again, managing interpersonal conflicts is difficult with any teams, however, it can be even more difficult when a leader is not physically available to resolve it. There's limitation to virtual communication when it comes to resolving interpersonal conflicts (Ebrahim et al, 2009).

It is also challenging for members to express opinions on virtual team than on conventional teams (Hastings, 2010) as evidenced by some of the members feeling unvalued and unheard in Greg's global team. This team is also facing some environmental challenges such as different time zones. As much as Greg has tried to accommodate and be sensitive to different time zones, he still came up with a meeting time that left some members feelings dissatisfied and unvalued. Local labor laws and different cultures are also other challenges this team is facing as the team is made up of members from four different countries. With these challenges above, this global team is facing many dysfunctions that surfaced during a crisis. Many researchers have studied the effectiveness of organizational teams and found that effective use of a team leads to great productivity, better use of resources, higher quality of services, more creativity, and more effective decision making and problem solving (Parker, 1990 as cited in Hill, 2010).

According to the Characteristics of Team Excellence by Larson & Lafasto (1989), an effective team needs following characteristics: clear and elevating goals, results-driven structure, competent team members, unified commitment, collaborative climate, standards of excellence, external support and recognition, and principled leadership (as cited in Hill, 2010, p.

252). Using these criteria, Greg's team first lack collaborative climate and collegiality among the team members. The failure of this team's collaboration is apparent and revealed even more during a crisis. There were many blame shifting and various personal conflicts became very visible. There is, for example, perceived neglect by UAE team, feeling that they have not received adequate face-to-face time with Greg and about becoming a subgroup to the India office. They've been feeling disconnected as well as feeling discomfort by team members as their two managers, Nazr and Ashok, don't get along. There's an underlying and perceived racism going on between the two teams as well.

They were not able to focus on the problem at hand and understand one another since the trust and respect were not established among members. Another dysfunction this team is facing is lack of leadership. It is no doubt that Greg is well established and valuable employee of Sun Microsystems, Inc. with many notable accomplishments. However, he overlooked specific challenges of leading a virtual global team and the importance of his role as a leader. As Hill stresses, " it is essential to understand the role of leadership within teams to ensure team success and to avoid team failure" (Hill, 2010, p. 242). Effective leadership is even more crucial with virtual teams and demands " 50% more investment" (Dyer, Dyer, & Dyer, 2007, as cited in Hill, 2010, p. 248). Greg failed to read all the " personal and contextual nuances" and potential conflicts among his team members (Hill, 2010, p. 248).

He failed to understand potential meaning of silence, misunderstandings, team process, and overlooked signs that have eventually led to

discontentment and misunderstandings of his team members. Greg formed his team rather quickly, composed of seven members from France, Inida, UAE, and US. James hired them based on their credentials and impressive resumes, but he didn't take time to assess their cultures or different personalities and how they would fit into his team. He then just applied the same Open Work Policy based on his experience at U. S., not really assessing for what his team members might need or prefer based on their cultural and environmental needs. Other noticeable dysfunction of the team is lack of unified commitment. This is a natural consequence from not having a collaborative climate. Larson & LaFasto (1989) explain that teams do not happen overnight and need to be " carefully designed and developed" that lead members to feel the " sense of unity or identification" (as cited in Hill, 2010, p. 254).

Greg's team is lacking this sense of oneness and belongingness, which led them to blame shift when there was a crisis. Lastly, one of the major dysfunctions this team is facing is lack of external support and recognitions. They are under the enormous pressure to perform to survive in an extremely competitive market, however, the structure of the organization is not set up to reward them or support their needs. It may seem like their Open Work policy and compensation are alluring and promoting independence and flexibility, however, this does not apply to all members of the team. As the results of their Survey of Satisfaction with Open Work for Greg's team show, most members in Asia Pacific are not satisfied with this type of environment. Expectedly, results show most favorable response from members in U. S.

and then from Europe and Middle East. Some members from other countries also feel that members in U. S. get higher compensation as well as being viewed as Greg's favorites. These underlying feelings of discontentment and mistreatment can obviously affect the team's cohesiveness as well as effectiveness.

As stated above, understanding the role of leadership is essential to ensure team's success, and this is even truer with virtual teams (Hill, 2010). In order for Greg to turn his team around and lead them to success, he should adopt Hill's Team Model for Team Leadership (Hill, 2010). This model will help Greg to be in the " driver's seat of team effectiveness" and will help him to effectively assess the team's problems and take necessary and specific steps to resolve these problems (Hill, 2010, p. 243). According to Hill's Team Model, Greg will have to closely assess the situation and decides whether he continues to monitor the team or take an action. However, this team is already in crisis and thus immediate action is needed by Greg. He needs to be flexible to meet the diverse needs of his team members and ready to take an immediate action to change the course of this team. During this assessment stage, Greg needs to " construct accurate mental models" based on his team's problems by seeking information and understanding his team's functioning (Hill, 2010, p. 244).

According to Hill (2010), the leader has the responsibility to direct and guide his team to behave and function in a way that help the team to achieve its optimal effectiveness. He can gather information and assess the team's functioning by obtaining feedback from his team members, seeking

assistance and mentoring from others outside the team, conduct surveys, and evaluate his team's outcomes based on their goals. Once he has all the information, then he needs to decide on whether he needs to intervene to meet tasks or relational needs. It is clear that Greg's team has many personal conflicts and therefore, latter intervention might be needed. However, he will also needs to assess how these internal conflicts have affected accomplishing team's tasks. It is apparent that they had a difficult time solving problems and making decisions. Hill states that task and development functions are closely interrelated, as shown through this team. Greg also needs to decide whether he needs to intervene internally or externally.

It may seem like their conflicts have occurred within the team, but there are other environmental factors such as their work schedule and differential compensation that led team members to feel discontented. Therefore, Greg may need to advocate for his team and speak with upper management regarding current working condition especially for some members in Asia and Middle East. To summarize, Greg's first priority is to focus and take an action on improving internal relationships among his team members. He should first gather his managers and resolve misunderstanding and conflicts to ensure that they are all on the same page. This should be done face to face, preferably. He may even consider having this meeting on a consistent basis, even if it's once a year, to build up team work and cohesiveness. Once all the managers are on the same page, they can go back and lead their teams more effectively and gain more commitment to the global team's

overall goal. Greg then going forward, needs to ensure that he vigilantly monitors the development of his team. Once he has addressed team's internal personal conflicts, he needs to also focus on internal tasks.

He needs to clarify and gain agreement on team's goal with his members and restructure his team to support results. He may have to reorganize his team members' roles and how they can streamline the communication better. He may have to readjust his team members' schedule to avoid gaps in services and communication. He should consider having a back-up person for each point of contact for customers, preferable from different country. He will also need to address the problem with queues immediately and train his team members with skills needed to rebuild them. Externally, Greg will need to monitor his organization's environment more closely and determine what actions need to be taken to improve his team's effectiveness.

He may have to advocate for his team members' needs to his upper management based on his their feedback. Greg should assess for " environmental indicators of team's effectiveness" using surveys such as the Open Work Suitability Survey he has conducted. He may have to implement different schedules based on each country's time zone and needs. He may also have to look into implementing one country's labor law, such as French vacation law, to all other members to be consistent. Greg may not be able to change some of organizational policies, but his team members need to see that their leader is invested in them and advocates for them.

In the case study of " Managing a Global Team: Greg James at Sun Microsystems, Inc.", Greg is faced with many complex issues that many global teams face: internal conflicts, internal tasks problems, and external environmental problems (Neely & Delong, 2009). As any teams, a leader's role is critical in establishing an effective team, but even more true with virtual teams. The leader has to be extra attentive and stay in tuned with his members' needs. His tasks may seem daunting, but it's possible to achieve effective global team if he is aware of these challenges and committed to monitor his team for effectiveness and intervene when necessary.

References

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