Reflective account of diversity and team performance nursing essay

This reflective account concerns my experiences of participating in a diverse team of people from different nationalities, which was formed for the achievement of specific outcomes over a specific period. The opportunity to work in this team arose in the course of an assignment for syndicate group work.

The importance of management of team performance is steadily gaining recognition in the area of modern day organisational behaviour. With modern organisations and operations becoming increasingly complex and dynamic, organisational performance is being driven by specialised employees who are organised into and work as teams. Salas, et al, (1992 p 4) defines a team as " a distinguishable set of two or more people who interact dynamically, interdependently, and adaptively toward a common and valued goal/objective/mission, who have each been assigned specific roles or functions to perform"

Organisational experts have for long been intrigued by the fact that whilst team work is now an accepted tool for improvement of organisational efficiency, many firms that arrange their operations around teams with such expectations find, much to their disappointment, that (a) use of teams has little impact on productivity, and (b) such use of teams can furthermore lead to reduction of productivity (Bolin, et al, 2006, p 2). It is also frequently seen that teams with high performing individuals fail, even as teams with far less impressive members greatly exceed expectations. The performance of the Detroit Pistons basketball team in 2004 and 2005, when they won back to back NBA championships with a roster of unimpressive players illustrates the team performance paradox (Bolin, et al, 2006, p 2). The continued

performance of the Ferrari racing team would not have been possible without the efforts of its back up staff (Robbins, et al, 2010, p 3). Such team performance paradoxes are evident across the world, with innovative start up teams with networking capabilities humbling huge established corporations with far superior technology and resources (Bolin, et al, 2006, p 2).

Understanding the mechanisms of team work is an integral component of modern day learning in organisational behaviour. I was required to participate in a team of members from different nations with different academic, cultural and social backgrounds in the course of syndicated group activity for a period of 6 weeks. The experience gave me the opportunity to participate in an actual team environment, even as I was increasing my academic knowledge of team dynamics and processes. This reflective account details my learning experiences during the process of my participation in a diverse multi cultural team that was required to perform specific tasks and achieve particular objectives and outcomes over a specific timeframe.

The essay is structured into sequential sections that take up the functioning of teams in its different aspects, the use of the IPO model for assessment of team effectiveness and the working, evolution and outcomes of our team over a specific 6 week period. Whilst academic theory on teams and assessment of team effectiveness is taken up in some detail, greater emphasis is placed upon my practical experience of participating in an interesting and enriching team environment. The essay ends with a

concluding section that attempts to sum up my learning experience and details the ways in which I have gained from this experience in team work.

Team Work

Modern texts on organisational behaviour identify specific characteristics of teams that differentiate them from general groups (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2004, p 7). These characteristics include (a) joint sharing of aims and objectives, (b) mutual dependency and trust, (c) overt expression of emotions, feelings and disagreement, (d) consensual decision making, (e) coordination, cooperation and cohesion, (f) management of trust feelings and conflict between team members, and (g) the creation of a collective and synergistic impact (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2004, p 7). Hackman (2002, p 11), states that teams also have very clear boundaries for membership, relatively stable memberships and defined authority to manage their activities and processes.

Team performance by and large represents the extent to which teams achieve their specific objectives (Hayes, 2002, p 43-46). Whilst such indicators of team performance are important for organisations because they assist in assessment of the extent of achievement of team goals, many teams, more particularly in business situations do not have targets that are clear and quantifiable (Hayes, 2002, p 43-46). Even where such targets are available, team members and managers can improve their performance in future if they are provided with a richer picture of the ways in which teams function (Senior, 1997, p 32-36). Teams, to be truly effective should thus have some understanding, not just of team outputs, but of the ways and means in which team members work together (Senior, 1997, p 32-36).

The Input-Process-Output (IPO) model provides an approach to the understanding of team work and team performance. Inputs, in the IPO model, are seen in terms of issues concerned with group composition like leadership, size, term and diversity, along with factors like autonomy, training and resources that are provided to teams (Ilgen, et al, 2005, p 517-522). Internal team processes comprise of factors like the motivation and commitment of team members, the cooperation and communication between them and their skills of leadership, conflict resolution, decision making and problem solving (Ilgen, et al, 2005, p 517-522). Outputs on the other hand are largely depicted as team objectives or the larger concept of team effectiveness that includes a range of interrelated outcomes in areas of attitudes, behaviours and performance. Such outcomes can occur at the level of individuals, teams and organisations (Ilgen, et al, 2005, p 517-522).

The theoretical paradigm behind much of research on team effectiveness comes from the application of the open systems theory, which states that team inputs (skills and abilities) are transformed into team outputs (the quality and quantity of team outcomes) through various interaction processes like utilisation of skills, effort and past strategy. The basic IPO model is flexible enough to be applied to a range of team settings and is illustrated in the figure provided below.

A general set of factors for assessment of team work in the context of the above discussion thus needs to include (a) the attitudes, behaviours, thinking, roles and skills of individual team members, (b) team objectives and purposes, which include the setting, clarity, commitment and achievement of goals, (c) team processes like generation of ideas, making of

decisions, management of controversy and conflict, communication style, allocation of responsibilities, planning of action and leadership style and (d) the organisational context with regard to structure, culture and associated issues.

Working and Evolution of our Team

Our experience of team work came about on account of participation in group syndicate activity for a period of 6 weeks. Our team was made up of six members and we were required to work together to (a) generate slogans for organisational use, and (b) achieve improvements in team working in areas of attitudes, behaviours and performance.

I aim to assess different aspects of the working and functioning of our team, in terms of the IPO model, and deal sequentially with inputs, processes, and outputs.

Inputs

Our team consisted of six members, A- myself, B, C, D, E and F. As the oldest and most experienced member of the group, I was the automatic choice for its leader. The chart provided below gives basic details and personality types of group members. The personality ratings have been determined by organisational tests conducted on individual members.

Member

A

B

C

D

E

F

Nationality

British

Chinese

Cyprus

Indian

Pakistan

Nigerian

Sex

Male

Female

Female

Male

Female

Female

Education

BA Hons History

International Business And Management

Business and Management

Bachelor of Technology

Graduate in BA

BSC Logistics

Profession

leading public and private businesses

Software Engineer

Extraversion

3. 8

1. 9

3. 8

3. 9

3. 7

3. 5

Agreeableness

4. 6

3. 5

4. 0

4. 1

4. 1

4. 3

Conscientiousness

4. 1

3. 9

2. 4

3. 9

4. 3

2. 9

Neuroticism

2. 7

3. 4

3. 1

2. 4

3. 2

4. 1

Openness to Experience

4. 5

2. 8

3. 5

3. 8

3. 9

2. 3

As evident, our team was diverse with respect to nationality, gender, education, and work experience and personality types. Contemporary academic literature on organisational behaviour agrees on the advantages of diverse teams in various areas of organisational work. Diversity in teams, organisational experts feel, results in the availability of a range of perspectives and skills, which, if harnessed properly, can result in greater

creativity in generation of ideas, alternatives and solutions than with homogenous teams and lead to better performance. Whilst diverse teams by and large have wider and better range of skills and abilities, it is often challenging to make them function in a coordinated and collaborative manner, in comparison with homogeneous teams. Such challenges to collaborative and coordinated working can arise because of differences in language, attitudes and perceptions of team members. The members of our teams came from different parts of Europe, Africa and Asia. Their academic backgrounds ranged from disciplines in the liberal arts to applied sciences, technology and management. Two of us, F and I had some working experience, even as the other four were fresh from college. Whilst the personality types of individual group members are different, all of us scored high on the agreeableness index and were happy to work and bond with each other.

As the oldest and most experienced member of the group, its leadership automatically devolved upon my shoulders. This development occurred, without my asking for it, because the other group members looked towards me for advice, suggestions and direction on the functioning of the group. We were at the time of formation of the group provided with specific tasks requiring the generation of a number of slogans for ultimate organisational use. Apart from have to deliver such specific services, we were informed that we would be judged twice, once half way during the course, i. e. after three weeks and finally at the end of six weeks; on completion of the group activity. Various group factors like (a) innovative climate, (b) participation, (c) clarity of objectives, (d) reflexivity, (e) interdependence, (f) autonomy, (g)

boundedness, (h) role clarity, (i) task conflict, (j) relationship conflict and (k) team satisfaction would be taken up for assessment during these occasions. We were informed to us that our progress would be made available to us at the middle and at the end of the syndicate activity in order to help us in organising our activities and improving our processes.

Processes

Leadership style is an important component of team work processes in the IPO model. Most texts on organisational behaviour stress on the importance of leadership in the efficient successful functioning of teams, even as the majority of both team successes and team failures are attributed to leadership decisions (Robbins, 2005, p 17-21). Fiedler's theory on leadership states that the adoption of leadership styles is often contingent upon situational circumstances and effective leaders alter their styles in line with situations, attributes and skills of team members, and team objectives (Fiedler, 1967, p 4-8). Leaders are otherwise expected to provide clarity regarding roles to members, communicate effectively, and generate feeling of inclusiveness by asking for comment and by expressing appreciation for contributions of team members (Stacey, 2003, p 15-19). Contemporary research on organisational behaviour also indicates that whilst leaders set the tone for definition of group activities, their subsequent responses are distinctly affected by their ongoing interaction and communication with team members (Stacey, 2003, p 15-19).

Whilst the role of leadership devolved upon me without my asking for it, I did not ignore my responsibilities and worked towards the development of a committed, clear and collaborative team. I allocated responsibilities to each

member and made constant efforts to improve and ensure communication with members on various issues associated with our team objectives as well as other areas of common interest. Although my efforts to communicate with group members were made easier by their general agreeableness, I often found B, the Chinese member to be reticent in her communication with the rest of us. She was not just very shy but also disinclined to explore new opportunities and experiences. These difficulties were however greatly made up by her conscientiousness towards her work.

Our group activity and objectives required extensive discussions between member, generation and bouncing off of ideas, and long hours of brainstorming. Many of such sessions resulted in small and big disagreements, some of which ended with members refusing to talk to each other for some time. F, the lady from Nigeria whilst otherwise friendly and agreeable, was prone to excessive argumentativeness, and even hysteria, if her views were not supported by others. Conflicts between her and other members also arouse because of her lack of dedication towards group work and occasional proneness to shirk her responsibilities.

We were fortunate that conflicts among group members were restricted and did not erupt frequently. Whilst friendly disagreements over work continued to happen, serious conflicts arose only on three occasions, all of them involving F. I felt conflict resolution to be one of my major responsibilities and was constantly looking for signs of disagreement and trouble. Whilst I would let constructive discussions and disagreements continue and sometimes even encourage them further, I took pains to ensure that personal bitterness between members did not set in and they refrained from

making offensive statements towards each other. I am happy with the fact that all members, including F started bonding with each other by the end of the fourth week, started respecting each other's point of view, and developed a healthy regard for their team mates.

Output

All our team members were delighted to find out that our group ended the activity practically at the top of the class, both in the number of generated slogans and in the originality of the two selected slogans.

The result proved once more that a diverse team can do very well at creative work in an environment of transparency coordination and communication. We were otherwise pleased to know that we had made good progress in all activity areas, except for boundedness, team and relationship conflict and team satisfaction. I feel that our problems in these areas essentially relate to the inability of our team to manage the disputes and disagreements that often surfaced around F. As the leader I take responsibility for such failures and do feel that I should have tried to use my position as leader to communicate more successfully with F and quell her various mental insecurities in working with people who were possibly more hardworking and gifted than she was. Such an approach would have improved group communication, collaboration and outcomes.

Conclusions

This reflective account deals with my experiences in a diverse team of 6 persons that was formed for the achievement of specific objectives over a particular timeframe.

The significance of team performance is progressively increasing in the discipline of organisational behaviour. With contemporary organisations becoming increasingly complex, organisational performance is now ever more driven by specially formed teams. Team performance normally represents the degree to which teams attain their particular objectives. Whilst such gauges of performance are necessary because they help in assessment of attainment of team goals, teams should also achieve some understanding of the ways in which team members work together.

The Input-Process-Output (IPO) model represents an approach to understanding team work and has been used by me to assess the functioning of our team. Our team was diverse in many respects. Diversity, it is felt, leads to greater and to better performance.

As the oldest and most experienced team, I became the team leader without asking for the position. I tried to live up to my responsibilities and worked towards the development of an effective team. We were fortunate that conflicts among members were limited and I tried to ensure that personal bitterness between members did not set in.

Our team ended the activity at the top of the class with regard to set objectives. We also made good progress in all areas except in team relationships and satisfaction, where our progress was average or even less. I feel that such problems arose from our inability to manage disputes and disagreements. I take responsibility for such failures and feel that I should have tried to communicate more successfully with certain members.

My experience of team work has however helped me immensely in maturing

as an individual and as a professional and I am grateful for the experience.