

Working in groups vs individually



In this essay various aspects of working in a group vs. working individually will be discussed. The idea here will be to study the pros and cons with relation to the particular individual and not to the group of which he is a part. First we will try to understand the dynamics of working in a group vis a vis individual, then understand the various issues involved in working as a part of the group. We would also see as to how those issues will be influencing the person, be it in the positive side or being a hindrance and also support the argument by stating prior personal experiences.

Introduction:-

Remember last time when you had to do a project, how did you go about doing it? You must have contemplated doing it by many ways. But something that comes to mind at the beginning is either individually or in a group. Every body by de facto knows what it is to be individual and perform a task individually, as he is the only person who is doing the task. But what is group and how it is formed and what are the dynamics involved in it is something we are about to discuss below.

So what is a group, it may be defined as a collection of several people who come together to do a particular task or goal. And the group dynamics refer to the characteristic of a group behavior and attitude. The basic concern of group dynamics is about the structure formation and functions of the group. In any organization groups are very common entity and hence their dynamics and deep understanding of the group is important in organisational behavior (Kirschner 2009). Group dynamics basically deals with why and how groups are formed and developed. In order to explain the same many

theories have been proposed. One classic theory developed by George Homans (1961), states that all groups are basically functioning of their activities, interactions and sentiments. And all the group theories professes that when individual persons share common activities, they get interactions among them and will develop either positive or negative attitudes towards each other. The groups can also be of various types based on how and why they are formed, that is basically we may put them in two categories like Formal and Informal groups. Formal Groups are formed to achieve specific organizational requirements such as a command group, tasks group, or functional groups. Where as the informal groups are formed by association of members based on their own interest or social activities. More or less the informal groups are involuntary associations (Mullins 2002).

Coming to the main issue of whether or not working in the group is going to be beneficial or not to us will be depending largely on the group structure, which is nothing but the relationships among the members that help and hold the group together in achieving the assigned goals. The structure of the group can be defined in a many ways; common among them would be to take reference to their Size, Norms, Roles And Cohesiveness.

Group Size:-

A group can be of any size ranging from two persons to a collection of large people, however small groups of size 2 to 10 are considered more efficient in their job performance as it allows active and positive interactions between the groups and also has least chance of negative synergy. Usually large groups involve a lot of confusion and chaos leading to waste of time in

deciding which process to be done and who should be doing it. The group size thus not only affects the group participation but also effects the satisfaction of the members.

Group Roles:-

In case of formal groups the roles and functions of the group members are all assigned as per pre-plan, in which each role will have specific duties and responsibilities to perform. Even though these are predetermined, some times new kind of roles also emerge in between and then it needs to be created and assigned to the already existing roles of the members. And these new roles often will be replacing the existing roles of the members who will be starting to be more assertive and start expressing themselves (Schwarzer 2007).

Group Norms:-

Mullins (2002) defined “ A group norm is an assumption or expectation held by group members concerning what kind of behaviour is right or wrong, good or bad, allowed or not allowed, and appropriate or not appropriate”. They are the common behavioral patterns which are exhibited by all the members of the group. The basic reason behind the creation of these norms is to facilitate the group survival, and to make the group behavior more predictable and organized.

Group Cohesiveness:-

The Social interaction is a very common and natural human behaviour. The aspect of group cohesiveness reflects how badly the members of the group

want to be together and the bond that exists among them. The amount of group cohesiveness is determined by a lot of factors. By normal conviction, the more difficult to be a group member, the more cohesive that group is considered to be. One more reason when a group tends to get more cohesive is when they are in tense competition from other groups or may be some external threat to their own survival. The basic thumb rule is the groups which are in small size and those which spend more time together tend to be more cohesive. The cohesiveness in work groups has many positives, like increases worker satisfaction, low turnover and absenteeism, thus leading to higher productivity (Argyle 1989). On the other hand high cohesiveness in groups at times may lead to detrimental effects also if the goals of the group are misalign with the organisational goals. Higher cohesiveness results in individual pressure on one another to abide to a common conclusion while making decisions, which will lead to a careless judgments and unrealistic appraisals of alternatives (Revenson 2005).

After having seen the dynamics of group, we will now understand the issues on which we are going to make a critical analysis of the pros and cons of group work. These issues are like Social support, group norms, peer pressure and conflicts.

Social Support:-

Social support is nothing but the physical and emotional comfort given and shown by our friends, family and colleagues. This basically is all about knowing that we are all a part of the larger community of people, who care and think for us and are concerned about our well being. And the critical part

of this support is that unless the receiver of the support views it a support, the communicative experience or message extended to him would not be considered as support. The social support can be understood in a variety of ways like, assistance or exchanging resources.

Peer Pressure:-

By peer pressure it refers to the influence or pressure exerted by a peer group in encouraging an individual in changing ones attitudes, values or behavior so that he or she conforms to the group norms. The social groups influenced by the peers include formal groups like political party, trade union or informal groups like a social clique. However a person who is affected by the peer pressure may or may not wish to continue with the group. This would also help persons in finding out if they really belong to the group, which would lead to adverse affects of the group's behavior (Steinberg 2007).

Conflict:-

A Conflict is a perceived difference of opinion or action of course on any issue. It is usually a dichotomy of actions for a goal to be achieved. It could be a simple intra personal conflict existing in a person or an interpersonal conflict that is appearing between two individuals or a group and an individual. It can also be between one group and another group (Brem 1995).

Basically there are three different types of conflicts existing, like go- go situation, where you want to do both the actions, where as you will have a chance to make only one selection. The other two types are go- no go type

of conflicts and the third one being -no go- no go type, where you don't want to take either of the decisions but still you want to make one choice. All conflicts in group are because of common resources which by their very nature are limited. By convention all conflicts are not counter productive. A conflict when used and controlled in the right way will be helping a great deal in increasing the productivity of the group. On the other hand, when not handled properly a conflict can have spiraling effect and can bring down an individual dignity and collapse the whole group (Managing Conflict within or between Groups, Australia).

Hawthorne Studies:-

The term was coined by Henry A. Landsberger (1955) while he was analyzing older experiments from 1924-1932 at the Hawthorne Works (A Western Electric factory outside Chicago). Hawthorne Works had commissioned a study to observe the efficiency of the workers under various stimuli both external and internal, which included physical working environment and also the group structures. Light was one such factor on which the effects were studied, to see if the workers would become more productive in higher or lower levels of light. The workers productivity has improved when changes were made and slumped when the study was concluded. It was observed that the gain in productivity is more due to the fact that they are being observed rather than the actual experiment itself. This Hawthorne effect is a form of reactivity where in subjects improve an aspect of their behavior by being experimentally measured simply in response to the fact that they are being studied and part of social investigation, not in response to any particular experimental manipulation.

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Advantages And Disadvantages:-

Having studied the various theoretical aspects on which we are going to critically analyze the advantages and disadvantages, we will now enlist the various experiences both personal and compiled from others. Either the choices whether group or individual has its advantages and disadvantages. An introvert that I am, working alone sometimes is more beneficial to me than in a group.

It is admitted that, working in groups has many benefits. With our partners, the project can be finished quicker. For example, when I was studying in university my final project was on “ Implementation of Stenography using BPCS”. We were a group of 4 individuals working on this project and we have assigned different tasks to each person of the group. This has made the division of work more efficient thus accomplishing the task was much easier and faster. This was a good way to improve our knowledge, presentation skills and learn from each other, since every one has a different skill set and ideas to implement. At the same time we had few challenges working as a team, such as one person had he own ideas and would not coincide/compromise with rest of the team and some of us had issue with the time being spent on the project and so on. But at the end of the day we kept our difference away and worked as a team to finish the project successfully.

On the other hand working individually also has some different kinds of advantages. The first major advantage that comes to mind is that we can work independent of any other person and don't have to rely on others.

While working alone, we have the freedom of using our own methods and work at our own pace and convenience. Working independently gives us the confidence to make our own decisions, based on our experience and expertise on our work. Moreover, we can manage our time and resources better when we work by ourselves. From my experiences of working individually and also in a group, working individual always gave me success and the ability and knowledge to learn new things. As I am an introverted person, I didn't find much joy doing job in a group. However I felt that I was not having any new innovative or divergent ways of working, which other wise would have made me to do a better job by being a part of the group.

Let's discuss how working in a group can enrich you individually as a person, while still being a part of the group. Just as said that many hands would make the job easier, we can achieve more as a collection of individuals rather than individually. There are numerous benefits of working as a part of a team, some of them can be stated as below

1. Creativity

Every body is born with a different skill sets, knowledge and personal attributes. When in a group different people with different ideas come together and more creative and innovative ideas are generated, which will help us in enriching our knowledge and may be use them for our future endeavors.

2. Satisfaction

As a team keeps on interacting more and more they tend to be more cohesive and enjoy the success of one another which leads to a greater satisfaction and team success.

3. Skills

No individual is born with all the skills required for doing every thing. So when we are in a team we can make use of the pool of skills from the group for implementing the job more easily.

4. Speed

When there is a need to do a big job, it would take a lot of time in finishing it, if everything has to be done by ourselves. However when the same job is performed by a team, there is an advantage of job sharing, and the same job can be assigned to members of the team, where in the job is completed at a much faster pace. For example, if we look at my final year project I mentioned earlier and if I had to do everything myself it would have taken long time, but since we separated the task and worked as a team we could finish it quickly with a great success.

Working in a team also has few disadvantages, which are usually hard to see them in our everyday work. When working in a team there will not be any individual losers or winners and no one can be blamed or no one can feel good of having achieved some thing like success. When we have situations where the group consists of only leaders then their team might just not work at all. The worst thing is that the people who are not of a leader type they may be pushed aside by the other members of the team. Leaders would be

concentrating on achieving the goal and won't care about helping other team members and socializing with them and won't become a good team. And on top of all these groups would have the conflicts, peer pressure and unnecessary waste of time.

Conclusion:-

The question of which one has more advantages is only of academic interest as ultimately, the result depends on what is best suited of the type and nature of the job and the individual personality and level of skill required along with all other constraints like time, money and resources available at your hand. Given that you have all the knowledge of above things, we would be able to make a decision which one works better for based on the situation. Though I prefer to work independently, if my job or situation needs me to be part of a group, I am always up for it and willing to be a great team player to contribute to the team success.