

# Assessing your own leadership capability and performance



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In this review, my own organization's leadership capabilities and performance will be assessed. This review will be based on Computime Ltd organizational structure and I will be showing my own understanding of the leadership styles within the organisation, reviewing the effectiveness of my own leadership skills but also discuss the adoption of an effective leadership style to motivate staff to finally meet the organizational values and goals.

Computime Ltd is one of the major IT organisations based in Malta employing 82 employees, delivering optimal solutions in the fields of IP communications, e-security, network infrastructure, finance and business applications, document management, strategic asset maintenance and software development. Computime's mission statement is " We Deliver" and with that in mind a clear set of strategic goals and values has been communicated to the executive management team down to the Solution Team managers.

### Organisation Structure

The executive management team is made up of five heads reporting directly to the two managing directors. Two heads are in charge of the technical solutions teams, one head in charge of the sales and marketing team, one head in charge of Finance and internal systems team, and one head in charge of the Project Management office team.

The technical solution teams consist of the Technology Solutions Team (handling Systems, Networking and Security solutions) and the Software Solutions Team (handling software development, bespoke application and Business Intelligence amongst others). The Software Solutions and

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Technology Solutions teams are made up of a total of six team managers who are in charge of the specific teams of field engineers and developers that design, implement, deliver and test the final products and solutions to the organisation's end customers.

My own role within Computime is Team Manager for the Network Solutions team that is a subset of the Technology Solutions Team, currently managing a total of six network engineers.

### Understand Leadership styles within an organization

The leader is the person who influences a group of people towards the achievement of organizational goals while leadership is the process of motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal. Various leadership styles will result in different impacts to the organization and hence it is up to the leader to adopt the most effective leadership style depending on the situation because leadership style is crucial for a team success.

At Computime, different leadership styles are observed at the different management levels. At the executive level, the leadership styles adopted normally vary depending on specific tasks. For example, heads use the directing leadership style for administration tasks while they normally adopt the delegation style for all technical tasks assigned to the solution team managers. When the directing leadership style is used, a hands-on approach is practiced with most part of the communication being only one-way. On the other hand, when the delegation leadership style is used, the executive

heads supervise technical tasks with minimal intervention because the team members are mature enough to carry out tasks on their own.

At the team managers' level, where problems are encountered during specific project tasks, the coaching style prevails and is used to help the team members solve issues and give feedback without criticizing. However in most situations, the delegation style prevails amongst team managers but with a distinctive difference in the level of freedom within the different solution teams. This type of leadership style is seen to have the most impact in achieving the organizational goals.

According to Tannenbaum and Schmidt – model of delegation and team development, the leader should always try to delegate and ask the team members to make their own decision to varying degrees according to their abilities. It is observed that Team managers within the Software Solutions team decide and then sell the decision to the team members while the team managers within the Technology Solutions team allow more the team to identify the problem, develop the options, and decide on the action within the manager's received limits.

The leadership styles adopted by both executive and team managers' levels within Computime more or less follow John Adair's simple Action-Centred Leadership model. This model emphasizes that to be effective in achieving organizational goals, there is a clear need for team managers to continuously keep a balance between the task itself, the team and the individual. From this model, it is understood that the leader needs to build

overall team morale, improve on the quality of solutions offered and also continually develop the team.

This balance is often observed difficult to achieve, especially within the solution teams. This is mainly attributed to the team formation stages as described by the Bruce Tuckman's model (1965). According to Tuckman, the team formation goes through the forming, storming, norming and performing stages in progression. In the forming stage, there is a high dependence on leader for guidance and direction. In the storming stage, team members vie for position as they attempt to establish themselves in relation to other team members and the leader, who might receive challenges from team members.

During the norming stage, agreement and consensus is largely forms among team, who respond well to facilitation by leader. Roles and responsibilities are clear and accepted. While in the performing stage, the team is more strategically aware; the team knows clearly why it is doing what it is doing. The team has a shared vision and is able to stand on its own feet with no interference or participation from the leader.

It is often noted that team members within the solution teams are seen shifting between the norming, performing and storming stages which makes it a real challenge for the team manager to know which best leadership style to use which ultimately has a high impact in achieving the organizational goals. This situation is coherent with Tuckman's argument, which states that while the team develops maturity and ability and while relationships establish, the leader needs to change the leadership style to be most effective.

Be able to review effectiveness of own leadership capability and performance in meeting organizational values and goals.

Computime has undergone a major restructuring process about one year ago to adopt the matrix structure and as part of this process, all teams at some point went through the forming stage (Bruce Tuckman 1965). For the network solutions team, this was a good opportunity to understand better the team members in various working aspects, and helped to initially bring the team to the norming stage. This involved my own effort as a team leader to balance the roles, communicate clearly the objectives and goals, define procedures, confront any issues, understand individual development and most importantly decide on which leadership style to adopt in specific situations.

It was proven that the most effective leadership style adopted in between the team forming stage and the team norming stage (Bruce Tuckman 1965) was the directing style where detailed instructions were given on what was expected from each member to achieve organizational goals. By organizing weekly team meetings, team members were providing feedback on their daily operations including improvements but also consolidating their understanding of their role within the team.

It was noted that some team members within the network solutions team tend to shift to the norming state after going through some technical difficulties in a particular project. In such situation, a combination of my own coaching and supporting leadership styles was balanced to provide team members a considerable amount of feedback on their progress and listen to

problems and concerns without criticizing and judging. This is considered a critical stage of the team building process but at the same time it is a good opportunity to keep the team members aligned with the company core values and objectives, which primarily are delivering high quality solutions in a timely manner and earn customer loyalty and satisfaction.

It is clearly communicated during the regular team meetings, that there needs to be a continuous team effort to provide an honest advice during the design, implementation, support and operation phases, be disciplined and organized, identify potential project risks and to immediately escalate to higher management if beyond one's own control. The need to have clear communication with the customer, other team members and the team manager during all stages of the project lifecycle is also pointed out.

When the team members are in the norming stage, my own preferred leadership style is coaching. It is observed that by working with team members to believe in their own abilities to do the job properly, praise them for their good work and constantly providing them with feedback, substantially helps the team advance to the performing stage. Once the team is observed to be in the performing stage, my own preferred leadership style is delegation.

The team is considered to be in the performing stage when the projects are being delivered to customer expectations, the team members are in harmony working together and with other teams within Computime, team members are willing to easily give feedback on their progress and show a positive attitude towards technical difficulties amongst other things. During

the performing stage, the team's confidence is observed to significantly improve thus resulting in the overall team efficiency. Team members are often seen to respond very well to the delegation style during the performing stage because they feel trusted in their ability to manage themselves, which in itself is a motivator for them.

However, one should point out that there exists a variation in the efficiency levels between team members throughout the norming and performing stages. My own biggest leadership challenge is to continuously try and keep team members working within close levels. For example, when particular team members are noticed to have difficulty keeping up the performing stage during the time other members are in the performing stage, the coaching style is normally adopted. It is observed that when there is a considerable difference in the levels of performance between team members, the team efficiency is greatly reduced with the end result of moving away from achieving company goals and objectives.

Be able to adopt an effective Leadership style to motivate staff to achieve organizational values and goals.

By continuously communicating Computime's values and goals and also the best way to achieve them, will help the team understand in what context certain decisions are being taken, why a particular behavior is expected and the importance of positive work attitude. It also helps team members understand that there might be conflicting differences between one's personal values and goals and the ones of the organisation, which need to be sorted out.



One of the most difficult challenges of being a good leader is to keep team members adequately motivated by probing into what makes them have a positive work attitude and so helping them develop to perform well. Adair promotes the 50: 50 rule and applies this rule to the individual motivators; 50% of motivation lies with the individual and 50% comes from external factors, among them leadership from another. He suggests that 50% of team building success comes from the team and 50% from the leader.

During the regular team meetings, it was identified that the motivational factors that help team members advance to the performing stage were self-development, meeting targets, good communication, good work environment and technical training. A lack of any of these factors within the team would hinder the team members' effective performance during day-to-day operations and sometimes-even cause a shift back to the norming stage.

In some circumstances, when a project is completed successfully, the team members involved in the particular project, would have a tendency to shift from the performing to the dorming state and a motivation effort is required to shift it back to the performing state again. By providing technical training and self- development for team members together with individual appraisal for the completed works triggers team members to start advancing to the performing state again. The coaching style is adopted in this scenario.

When the team is performing well, one task that normally is delegated and one, which continuously needs improvement, is the creation of standard solution blueprints. These blueprints enable the team to have specific templates to standardize the design, implementations and testing. During

the weekly team meetings, these solution blueprints are reviewed and the information is shared within the team for further feedback. It was noticed that this task in itself motivates the majority of team members because it gives team members the opportunity to assess their own performance on specific projects and also gives them the chance to give positive and negative feedback to the team manager that may include any necessary changes in the day-to-day team operations.

By using this methodology in the performing stage, the team considerably improves the probabilities of staying in this important stage because one can focus more on the planning of other important tasks of the project lifecycle. In addition, there is the added advantage that other team members can significantly decrease the learning curve to implement solutions that are not in their comfort zone and thus helps make the team more resilient.

## Conclusion

In this reflective review, it is shown how different leadership styles are adopted across the organisation but also within the teams with particular attention to the team formation stages. Team members behave in different ways with different degrees of maturity, positive or negative attitude and motivational factors. It is a real challenge for the team leader to balance this out across all the members and to try to keep the team in the performing stage as much as possible. The team needs to be aligned with the company goals and values, so good communication at all organizational levels is vital to achieve this.

Some may argue with Adair's "50:50" rule, however my own reflection is that with the appropriate leadership style in different situations, the team can be motivated to perform and team members can be in harmony as well as aligned with the company values and goals. Ultimately, Computime is nothing but a team and its success totally depends on the success of all sub-teams including all team members, but not least, their leaders.