

Reflection on leadership, communication and teamwork



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1. 0 Introduction

Complexities in assignments and projects have facilitated the adoption of team approaches to problem solving. In many learning institutions and places of work, team approach has led to different people being brought together in order to benefit from their varying but combined experience and manpower. Studies by Pokras (2002) have revealed that team members perform to their best standards if a common target or goal had been readily identified before the formation of the team. Identification of the common goal in initial stages is the key to team success since every team has its own defined roadmap for achieving the identified goal. Achievement of the target also involves each team member identifying his role in the team and doing his best to achieve it. Team members are likely to encounter challenges when working on achieving their common goals. To ensure success in their teams, they need to understand overall issues that affect the performance of their members.

In line with the above, this written report seeks to reflect on the overall team experience as was displayed by Team 4 members when they undertook tutorial preparation and tutorial discussion assignments. The report identified the observations on team experience; dynamics and development. The varying characteristics of Team 4 members were also noted and are also described in this report.

The report goes ahead to link the observations of Team 4 members to the various academic theories on team experience. Secondary literatures addressing team experience themes are consulted for the proposed

academic theories. The report then concludes with reasons on why Team 4 experiences were as observed and noted. Recommendations are the provided on how best Team 4 members can improve their future team spirits and experiences. It is our desire that any team reading this report will find it interesting and valuable for their future use.

2.0 Observations of Team Experience

As the name suggests, Team 4 was constituted by 4 members; 1 female and 3 males. To hold each member accountable on his/her role in the group, Team 4 members decided to nickname each member. As such, the following members made up Team 4; Member 1, Member 2, Member and Member 4. The observations below have adopted this naming.

During their first meeting, Team 4 members unanimously agreed on the use of face to face, Skype, and mobile phone services of voice and short messaging services (sms) as avenues of carrying out the discussion. Amongst the 3, face to face communication was the most frequently used method of carrying out the team work since members consented to the idea that immediate feedbacks were easily passed between them when using this method.

Most observations were therefore noted during the face to face sessions. The overall rating for the observations made can be summarised as 70% positive and 30% negative. The following is a presentation of some of the major observations as displayed by Team 4 members. The presentation involved identification of key variables and the observations made on members.

2. 1 Leadership Roles

Though it was earlier on agreed that leadership role at Team 4 was to rotational, it was observed that some members feared the responsibility of assuming leadership roles when it came to their turns. The creation of the tutorials for presentation in class called for each team member to assume a leadership role on a rotational basis. This was considered key to success of any team since each team was to be later on required to successfully present their tutorials before the class. The presentations required every member of the group to take a leadership role at the time of presentation and therefore the reluctance by Member 2 and Member 4 to assume leadership roles caused a lot of worries to Member 1 and Member 3 since it was projected that it would impact negatively on the overall performance of Team 4. During the initial meetings, Members 2 and 4 would faithfully request any of their colleagues to volunteer by taking up the leadership roles on their behalf. Reasons put forward in their defence were that they deemed themselves less skilled when it came to creating slides and providing the logical structure upon which discussion topics were to be handled. One member, Member 2, was even bold enough to state before the other members that he lacked the courage to articulate issues before a group of people.

To correct on this, Members 1 and 3 had to assume guidance and encouragement roles. In encouraging the two to improve on their courage, Members 1 and 3 borrowed Topchik (2007) motivational quote that called on fearful people to focus on by speaking up and listening openly for them to built trust (p. 10). As time wore on and more meetings were held, Members 2

and 4 were able to develop their courage and lead the discussions to the best of their understanding. They could usher in members to give out their suggestions as well as interrupt them to allow their colleagues to seek clarifications in areas where they felt dissatisfied.

2. 2 Knowledge on Topics Discussed

It was observed that the four members experienced variations when it came to understanding the topics under discussion. For instance, in one session Member 1 emerged as the most knowledgeable in identifying and linking the relationships between various sub-topics. In the succeeding session, Member 3 assumed this role. These variations helped the sharing of knowledge amongst Team 4 members.

2. 3 Contributing Towards Discussion Topics

Though Members 2 and 4 had initially shown fearful factors, it was observed that all Team 4 members took an active role in contributing towards topics at hand. Everybody would seek an opportunity to express his ideas, and his colleagues would either agree or disagree on the particular member's points.

2. 4 Conflicts and Disagreements

As every member became active in the discussions, it was observed that Team 4 members could not hold to each other's opinions and wishes. A practical case emerged one Saturday when Member 1 proposed and insisted that every member was to present to the class the section which he or she oversaw as the leader of the team. In sticking to his view, Member 1 claimed that it was common sense that as a leader of the session, each leader stood a better chance of presenting the section to the class. However, his

colleagues completely objected to his opinion on the view that teamwork and team spirit called on all members to have an even understanding of all the issues discussed by the team, and as such, each had an equal understanding of the sections. To them, anyone could comfortably present any section. The disagreement arising from this varied opinions boiled to the extent that all members had to unanimously agree to call off the session to avoid on the impending physical fights. However, on a positive note, Member 1 had to drop his hard line stance and adopt other members' suggested random selection.

2. 5 On the Issue of Time

It was observed that members attended to sessions on time. Only one chance of late arrival was observed when Member 3 arrived 30 minutes late into the discussion. However, she had written a phone message to every member of the team to inform them of her late arrival since she was held up on traffic at the time of the meeting.

3. 0 Theoretical Evaluation

Institutions of learning and business organizations have continued with their adopted norm of using team approach as the tool for achieving specific tasks. Teams continue to gain increasing attention as potentially important organization assets (Zayed and Kamel, 2005, p. 1). The increased adoption of team approach or team experience across these institutions has called for the need to provide information on the themes and dynamics involved in teamwork to help them achieve or attain their set targets. These may include amongst others;

3. 1 Definition of Teams

Teams are groups of individuals who accomplish designated objectives by working independently, communicating effectively, and making decisions that affect their work (Topchik 2007, p. 7). On their part, Zayed and Kamel (2005) defined teams as two or more independent individuals who interact with and influence one another in order to accomplish a common purpose (p. 1). From his research, Pokras (2002) summarised team chemistry as consisting of the following three parts; communication, consensus and contracting (11).

From the definitions above it can be deduced that Team 4 comprised of the four individuals who worked to achieve a common goal of preparing tutorials on selected topics for presentation. They interacted through face to face, Skype or messaging and talking on phone. Zayed and kamel (2005) noted that many people across business fields had come to replace the term group with team. To such people, the two words mean the same and can therefore be used interchangeably.

3. 2 Succeeding as a Team: Levels Involved

The joining together of members to form a team does not guarantee the success of the particular team. The formation stage may bring together quiet, cautious or tentative members who may take a while before starting to go through the storming stage (Zayed & Kamel, 2005, p. 10). The storming process may involve team members studying each others' tensions, differences as well as conflicts. After learning of members characteristics, team members advance into the second stage where they actively concentrate on solving their problems. Teams achieve their goals
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when members start interacting smoothly. At this level, each member is energetic, dynamic and productive leading to the team attaining success by achieving their set common goal.

3.3 Characteristics of a Good Team

According to RIC Publishers (2003), good team members listen to each other, cooperate, have clear team goals and allow each member to freely express his or her opinions (p. 24). On his part, Topchik (2007) went on to postulate that best team experiences had roles of each member clearly defined, had members who were open and honest in communication, had a supportive and knowledgeable manager, allowed members to freely make decisions and rewarded or recognized its members when they successfully achieved its goals (p. 6).

4.0 Conclusion

Though little disagreements were observed in Team 4's meeting sessions, the team successfully achieved its goal of creating presentation tutorials. This was reflected in the comprehensive and detailed tutorials that were successfully presented to the class on the presentation day. The ability of the all Team 4 members to respond confidently and accurately presentation questions also contributed in highlighting the team's success.

In assessing the hard line stands taken by some team members, it was concluded that the decision by the teacher not to give due attention to members characteristics at the time of forming the teams may have played a facilitation role. As Topchick (2007) notes, when forming a team, the

individual's skills, knowledge and experience should constitute the number one criteria for team membership (p10).

5.0 Recommendation

Best on Team 4's achieved results; the following recommendations stand to be made.

Team 4 members should learn the importance of recognizing each other's contributions. This makes every team member to feel that his/her work is very meaningful and important. As such more contributions are likely to be forwarded by the motivated team members.

The rotational team leaders should know that their leadership roles involve coordinating member activities. They should therefore not get discouraged or shy away from assuming these leadership roles based on their inferiority complex. Drawing from Dan and Lane (2008) works, team members who initially declined to take up their leadership roles are informed that effective team leaders are tasked with enabling everyone to contribute their unique skills (p. 307).

Members should be in a position to accommodate the views of other members by dropping their hard line stands. Team works are intended to avail avenues for their colleagues to share their opinions and arrive at common stands.

Lastly and as Exley and Dennick (2004) opine, in cases where members are handling complex topics, several discussion sessions should be created to

help members to research more on the topic at hand. This will help them to develop and accumulate knowledge on these topics.