

Self managed teams: challenges



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This paper discusses the concept of the self managed teams, its advantages and its limitations. Today most of the organizations follow varied kind of hierarchy structure, but very few large organizations, in fact only six organizations are truly following the accurate concept of the self managed teams in their organization.

This paper shows the change in leadership style which is required to bring about a real turnaround to implement the concept of self managed teams from a traditional management hierarchal concept. There are tremendous challenges in implementation of the same, this paper thus discusses about how to mitigate those risks and how to achieve successful implementation.

The paper also exemplifies a real case of implementation of self managed team concept and then the organization shifting to traditional management hierarchal concept and then using a combination of both in the span of three years.

Thus this paper will show the advantages, limitations of traditional hierarchical concept and the self managed team concept, and then discuss how to implement it effectively and efficiently. This paper will also raise questions on the concept of pure self managed teams versus the combination of traditional concept and the self managed team concept.

Barry (1991) argued that self-managed teams need more leadership than conventional teams around both task-related issues and team development issues.

Introduction

Today most of the organizations across the world follow a traditional approach in their hierarchical structure and their leadership style. They range from line and staff organizations, to vertical or horizontal organizations, to matrix or pyramid structure, to a newer project management structure.

All these models evolved through the time in the quest for better, efficient and effective management structure to remove the limitations of other structures and to implement the structure which suits best for that particular organization. The changes which organization brings are rare, as it changes the entire working style and thus the productivity of the organization.

Generally this happens when business process reengineering is implemented in the organization.

The self managed teams concept is rather a very new concept, which still finds difficulty in its implementation and in acceptance by the large organizations. This method is easy to implement for very small scale companies, but the difficulty to implement increase with the increase in the size of the workforce.

It is very important to note that, most of the changes have failed due to improper leadership style, and thus to successfully implement this concept one needs to implement proper leadership style. As the success of implementation depends a lot on the type of leadership used during and after the transition period.

There are again limitations and advantages to both the types of teams, i. e. conventional and self managed. Therefore it is important for any organization to understand its own requirements and map it with the benefits that each of the style provides.

Introduction to case

The case which will be discussed in this paper is an example of an organization in a college, which competes with other clubs in event management. This club 'CSI' implements self managed team concept in its year of inception, whereas other clubs like 'IEEE', 'ACM', 'Prism' uses conventional method. This is an example of the club became successful in its very first year, and how others failed. Then CSI also transformed itself into traditional method of organizational hierarchy and traditional leadership style, which led to drastic decline in the growth rate of the club. Realising this mistake, CSI Leaders used their experience and knowledge and came up with a unique solution integrating the concept of self managed team and conventional teams, taking best out of both worlds and becoming the most successful organization in the college.

Difference between self-managed team and a conventional team

There are various characteristics which are the factors which differentiate these two concepts. They are leadership, team member role, accountability, work effort, task design and skills. The leadership style in self managed teams is within the team and in conventional its outside the team. The team member role in the Self managed teams is interchangeable, whereas in the conventional teams, It is fixed. The accountability of any task is on the team

for self managed teams, whereas it is on individual in conventional teams. Self managed team members have cohesive work effort for any task, but in the conventional teams the work effort is divided. The “ task design” in flexible in self managed teams, whereas it is fixed for other concept. The team members are expected to be multi-skilled in self managed teams, whereas conventional teams calls for specialized people.

Benefits of self managed teams

It gives greater improvements in the quality, speed, process and innovation. It provides greater and improved employee motivation. There is a sense of belonging created in one’s work. Every member achieves the sense of ownership, which leads to accelerated new product development. It helps in greater participation from employees. It also reduces the operational cost and provide job satisfaction to employees, and also provides higher productivity, commitment and lower absenteeism and turnover rates.

Self managed team and its leader

When we say “ I am the leader of a self managed group”, it sounds like an oxymoron. Thus it is important to understand the essence of leadership in a self managed team.

Self-managed team = self- responsibility + self- accountability; 100% without management

It requires different leadership style which comprises of not applying ‘ hands-off’ approach, managing boundary between team and organization and playing as facilitators.

There must be interdependence and joint responsibility for outputs. In the traditional system, the required skill at every level of work is reduced, which produces boredom in the bottom level jobs, and the new system integrated the need of the people with the work to be done and those closest to the jobs help design the job.

Thus comes the concept of “ Distributed leadership”, this is a very important concept for any self managed team. The self managed team members should manage themselves through distributed leadership. There should be multiple leaders taking complementary leadership roles in rotation within the same SMT , according to the areas of expertise or interest. The leadership style should be developed according to the circumstance and requirement and should be rotational. It is important to note that the success also depends on the quality of relationship between members, collective orientation, strong identification with the team and interest, cohesion and prior experience. The external leader’s job it to create an environment wherein team members can take responsibilities and solve complex problem on their own.

Disadvantages of Self Managed Teams

There are various disadvantages of SMT which give more challenges for the leader. They are social loafing, group think, counter-productive conflicts, political activity and passing the buck.

Advantages of SMT -(The things the leader should work for)

The advantages of SMT are employee morale, efficiency, quality, economic savings and overall organizational performance.

Changing roles of leaders in self managed teams

The leader should follow certain roles to ensure effective leadership in self managed teams. One of them is Mentoring. A senior employee who sponsors and supports a less experienced employee (a protégé) by presenting ideas, listening well and by empathizing and does proper mentoring in self managed teams. Such mentoring is expected from a leader of self managed team.

The role of mentor can be divided into two functions, career and psychological functions.

The career function includes the following

Coaching the less experienced employee to develop skills and achieve work objectives

Acting as a sounding board for ideas that the protégé would be otherwise reluctant in sharing with their supervisors

Providing protection from the possible risks to his/her reputation

Lobbying to get him/her challenging and visible assignments

Providing exposure to influential individuals within the organization

Sponsoring the protégé by nominating her for the potential advances or promotions

The psychological functions include

Sharing personal experiences

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Acting as a role model to the protégé

Providing acceptance and friendship

Counseling the protégé about the anxieties and uncertainties to help bolster his/her self confidence.

There is another concept called informal mentoring which also helps in successful implementation of self managed teams. This includes

Senior managers personally selecting an employee and taking that employee as a protégé.

Many Organizations rely on this phenomena

Most effective mentoring relationship outside the immediate boss-subordinate interface.

The boss-subordinate relationship has an inherent conflict of interest as the manager directly evaluates performance of the subordinate limiting openness & meaningful communication.

There are certainly benefits to mentor, which includes

Mentor gets access to the attitudes & feelings of lower ranking employees

Protégé can be an excellent source of early warning signals to identify potential problems.

Create a win-win relationship for the benefit of the program.

The issues in a mentorship program are

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Research indicates that minorities and women are less likely to be chosen as protege

Only a limited pool thus can accrue the benefits o mentorship

Mentors tend to select protégés who are similar to themselves w. r. t. background, gender, education, race, religion, ethnicity etc.

Thus benefits of informal mentorship programs suffer as formal programs are encouraged under the above mentioned pretexts.

Self Leadership

The self leadership is defined as “ lead oneself” or controls one’s own behavior. Effective leaders help their followers to lead their own self by developing leadership capabilities in others, by developing ability in them to give self direction and motivation and by nurturing followers to be independent,. Empowered and self-managed teams need individuals who themselves are self directed.

This concept assumes that people are responsible, capable and are able to exercise initiatives without the external constraints of bosses, rules or regulations. When given the proper support individuals can monitor & control their own behavior.

Means to self leadership

The individuals who are in a boss-centered relationship cannot simply adjust to self managed teams. Such transition requires training which helps the transition from dependence to autonomy. One should follow horizontal organization chart instead of vertical chart, as vertical reporting relationships

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matters but at the same time the colleagues and the people with greater impact are peers. The focus should be on influence and not control, as one should do the job with their colleagues and not for or to them. A leader should not wait for the right time to make a mark, they should create their own opportunities rather than waiting for them.

How to handle change? From a leader's perspective

In today's organizations, employees require assurance about their own future. When such implementation is done, the general question which comes to everybody's mind in an organization are "are they being eliminated?", "Will their roles be redefined" In such cases a leader should provide honest answers to the employees' concerns. The day to day skills in managerial functions reside in the supervisors. Leaders need to direct the work group in its transition, empowerment and development. They need to learn when to hold on and when to let go. All this requires planning, facilitating, training and team-building skills. The leaders should provide ongoing coaching support, linking the team's role with the rest of the organization. The top management plays a very vital role in this whole transition as they should strongly champion and sponsor the teams, the commitment must be ongoing and constantly visible. The support should be reinforced with the provision of sufficient resources which also includes time. The management must display patience and tolerance because the transition will take time and there will be delays and the mistakes are bound to happen.

Some more challenges in developing self direction

Developing the teams and then fostering a culture of management support is one of the major challenges which leaders face. The teams go through various stages of increasing involvement on their way to self-management. It can take somewhere between two and five years, and this process or transition is never ending from a learning and renewal perspective. For this comprehensive training is critical, as employees need to learn how to work effectively in teams, how to develop skills so that they can manage their own processes. Every team member should be cross trained in every other team member's job. Therefore, it is not uncommon for self directed work teams to spend 20 percent of their time in ongoing training.

Various other roles of a SMT leader

There are various other important roles of a SMT leader which comprises of the following

communicate and represent the team's interests.

help each member to develop and use their skills.

demonstration of concern for each member and the team.

facilitate group processes.

knowledge of the group's work processes.

ability to help the team to maintain its focus.

setting an example thorough one's behavior, personal values, energy and actions.

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CSI CASE STUDY

Every college has various clubs which improves the overall curricula of the college by creating events, arranging workshops and seminars and thus up brings the knowledge level and the skills of the students directly or indirectly involved with it. These committees are run by group of students selected by the faculty in charge of that particular cell. The management of any club includes registration of members, taking care of club's finances, creating a team which organizes events, seminars and workshops.

The club is rated successful when it provides maximum benefits to its members, arranges great lectures and seminars, and organizes great events with good prize money. CSI was a new club formed amidst existing IEEE student body in MPSTME. As being a new body, the faculty in charge decided to form a committee of first year students, who will do all the ground work and also the committee of the senior students who will guide the first year inexperienced students.

This concept was a self managed team concept which was criticized by body like IEEE, who preferred traditional hierarchical approach and traditional leadership style.

In CSI all the committee members were given full authority and responsibility to create out of box events, bring out innovation and do whatever they want to. This included acceptance of failures too. The result of this was

Students who were not initiative takers became followers, and those who had an urge to be a leader, started leading the group.

As there were few number of leaders in the group, the senior committee decided to divide them into teams, and allocated tasks to each identified leader

Another rule which was set was, one leader will have to work for other leader in his/her event.

This resulted in idea leaders, who direct the entire group and directs the whole team

By this method each and every member performed various activities for an event like marketing, handling public relations, publicity, managing finances, managing logistics and coordinating all the members to ensure that the work is done. Thus resulting in extensive training.

This also gave a sense of ownership amongst all the team members, as everyone had an equal right as the leader and everybody contributed to the event.

The roles of every team member changed with the tasks, but still the accountability was for the entire group. With this kind of approach the entire group generated many multi skilled student members.

Although IEEE did manage to do better events than CSI in its first year, but it was very clear that CSI had outnumbered IEEE in terms of number of events done in a year.

IEEE did three events, in which all were successful, but there was very little learning amongst the new first year students, as the roles were fixed, a

marketing person doesn't even know what happens in publicity, rather doesn't even know who all are in the publicity team.

It was very clear that IEEE student body members didn't even know each other, whereas in CSI all the students came to know each other very well because of the number of times they interacted. This was a very wonderful approach for team building. As clearly this first year student would lead CSI in coming years and now they have knowledge, skills and the entire team was together. The morale was very high.

The students always have an incentive of certificates and posts when they join any club, but due to such kind of work culture of self managed teams, most of the CSI students incentive became " to make CSI the biggest club in college and that too sustainable"

This happened because all the students developed a sense of ownership; they took care of CSI as something of their own creation. They wanted this culture to remain and continue for the coming years.

It was clear that the second year would be very promising for CSI because of its self managed team structure and it will overtake IEEE.

The new committee selection was done which included some more new students in the group who opposed the idea of committee, as it was important to have certificates and posts also. Giving a thought on this the faculty in charge decided to create a structure.

This resulted in serious damage as the new members did not work as their seniors did. Most of the work was done by those students whose incentives were changed.

Still CSI managed a brilliant show that year, creating better events than IEEE and also more number of events.

At the same time there were other clubs formed which posed major threat to CSI.

The experienced students understood their mistake of conversion to traditional hierarchical structure and decided to come up with a solution. The solution should bring out best of both traditional method and self managed team concept.

Traditional method's advantage was the experience of students, and the power of authority, and self managed teams' advantage was the learning and development of sense of ownership and greater team building.

The students came up with a hybrid structure which involved a traditional hierarchical senior committee which will be mostly advisory and the junior committee which will do all the work.

Thus this helped in great team building amongst the junior members, who got the same level of experience, skills, knowledge, and sense of ownership and became a great team.

The new team was always under the guidance and mentorship of senior students and the experienced seniors ensured that most of the work is done by them.

Another out of the box thinking which was again criticized by many, was the senior students allowing junior students to fail in less important events risking the reputation of the organization.

This was done as the motto of the organization was changed from 'being the best' to 'creating the best'.

CSI valued learning more important than success and believed that small failures teaches a lot to students and gives even better sense of ownership and responsibility.

The concept of self managed team was strongly opposed by the students who joined in the second year, and most of them resigned in the third year, leaving CSI in huge problems.

But due to implementation of the self managed team concept and continual guidance of the senior students the CSI came back powerfully and created history by starting a technical festival of the college after addressing to lot of oppositions from everyone in the college. The oppositions were from already set student council, various other committees like IEEE, college authorities.

But due to the culture developed and the skills of the students which was developed as a result of training under self managed team, CSI overcame all this hurdles and created 'Taqneeq' - the technical festival of MPSTME.

This case is a brilliant example of how self managed teams work efficiently and what are the limitations of both self managed team and conventional teams.

It also shows how to implement self managed team concept and how to overcome challenges involved with it. It also shows that one should tailor the organizational structure according to the need of the organization, as in the case of CSI it was a hybrid organization comprising of both the concepts of self managed teams and conventional teams.

Conclusion

The self managed team is a new concept, which will take time to implement in any large organization. It requires a complete change of mentality amongst the people of the organization. They will always be resistive to such a change, and thus to bring out this change successfully, efficiently and effectively, one requires a great leader who carries out the entire transition the way it should be carried out as discussed in the paper.

In any large organization, this change would bring a sudden break in their productivity, but in long term it would bring more and more profits into the organization than it did previously. There are large numbers of benefits as discussed and it is upon the leader who decides the fate of the organization when the transformation takes place.

The organization thus should first identify its need and then tailor the structure according to its requirements ensuring the implementation of self managed team at one level and then let it grow organically inside the organization to a level at which the entire organization is a self managed

team. It is a gradual process and takes lot of time which should be met with a lot of patience and tolerance from senior management and great amount of resources.

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wikipedia

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