

# Od action research (step wise example)



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Step -1 : Top management perception of the problem Company ABC grew from 20 people to 500 in the past 3 years.

Recently, the company developed from being regionally based to becoming a national organisation, with three divisions and four corporate service groups. These subgroups comprised seventeen people from four areas: delivery services, sales support, production planning and invoicing. There were three team leaders. The sub groups were reluctant to get together. There was frustration; unmet expectations and negativity between the different teams.

Some team members felt special and others felt invisible, and this is causing friction and reduced effectiveness in the organisation. Step -2: Consultation with Behavioural Science Consultant At this point the consultant was called upon to suggest and work out the solution seeking the following outcomes from the project:

- To develop a happy and functional team so that staff want to come to work
- That staff cope well with the changes ahead including the shared physical environment
- Staff are comfortable with each other and understand their different responsibilities, and deliver to both internal and external customers
- That staff support each other as a new team.

Step -3: Data gathering & preliminary diagnosis of the problem Knowing that some of these people have worked together for a number of years it was difficult to understand the reported negativity and reluctance to get together.

Consultant suggested exploring the existing network of relationships and the informal lines of communication. A series of discussions with team members were held to discover their way of thinking, and some of the skills, experience and attributes they are bringing to the new team.

Step -4: Feedback to the key clients or client group The meetings were lively and open. Staff wanted to see five outcomes achieved: Clear definition of responsibilities – “ the grey areas to be defined, especially where it’s no-one’s job, but it has to be done. “ •Communication – “ we share information versus chasing around trying to get it. Not expecting people to know when they haven’t been told”. •Manager and team leaders relationships – “ we can raise issues and the manager/team leaders are available to us. Don’t let problems hang around.

” •Team qualities – “ knowing you can rely on people to help when you are overloaded. And, with a large group of busy people who rush around a lot – the need for some privacy and our own space. •The barriers of ‘ getting together’ so we are no longer ‘ us and them’ are addressed Step -5: Joint problem diagnosis The interviews revealed three examples of ‘ us and them’

- oSome staff (sales support & production planning) were closer to the managers and had better working conditions than others.
- oThose closer to managers worked with external customer relationships, and the others related mainly to internal customers. Internal customers were perceived as less important, and hence those working with them were also seen as less important.
- oThe production planning team reported directly to the national manager.

These people valued highly their independence and were reluctant for this to change. Others perceived these team members as aloof and unavailable.

Step -6: Joint action Planning To address team members concerns and to achieve the results both they and their manager wanted, team building approach was used. This utilized the team’s normal meeting structure –

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reinforcing team development as not special or separate from operational activities to give a chance for building ongoing relationships in the workplace.

Step -7: Action A series of half-day team sessions over a three-month period were held. These focused on developing relationships, enabling communication, problem solving and decision making within the newly formed group, ensuring their concerns were addressed. The criterion used here was: ' Who in this group can I rely on to help me solve a work problem I might have when we're in the new team' was used Step -8: Data gathering after Action The results indicated many team members had a large number of positive problem solving relationships; four of the seventeen people had mutual (two-way) relationships with more than half the group. This means they chose more than nine people in this category and were chosen by the same people as mutual problems solvers. These four people held the key to the information flows within the group and were likely to know what is going on within the group.

What was relevant here was one of three team leaders. While perceived as being in the ' them' team, she is a central player in the informal network of communication. Others were more selective in whom they chose specifically, one team leader who made five choices and received eleven. Only two of these choices were reciprocated. One interpretation of this result is that while staff saw him as responsible for problem solving he had yet to enact this as a shared role. He relied on people who were not able to solve problems.

Practically, this meant problems sat on his desk. While two team leaders chose one another, and were chosen by third team leader they didn't choose her. A number of her choices were unreciprocated. Whatever the reasons for this, it is apparent she was perceived as being unavailable on the chosen criteria of problem solving. Usually individuals to receive a large number of choices but whose own choices remain unreciprocated, feel isolated.

Step -9: Feedback to client group These results, reflected in the data collected directly relate to three of the outcomes being sought: \_ Communication \_ Manager and team leaders relationships and, \_ Getting together rather than ' Us and them' The need to generate a shared approach to problem solving amongst team leaders was now apparent. There was a gap between the healthy informal network of relationships and the formal team leader structure. The neutrality of two team leaders towards the third now needed addressing amongst the team leaders. They noticed this too. The unreciprocated choices of many of the team members confirmed what many had been aware of - while they might take a work problem to someone, it was more perceived as a complaint and problems tended to hang around. Step -10: Re diagnosis One implication of collecting relationship information is the consultant needed to work skillfully with those participating as they gain insight, process and apply what they are learning about themselves and their relationships.

The key to organisation change lies in developing the role relationships amongst the team members resulting in changes in behaviours. After responding to and working with their individual and group information, the dynamics of one-way choice was explored, mutual choices (you choose

someone to solve a work problem with and that person chooses you) and the desirability of mutual choices for collaborative group behaviour. Step -11: New action Planning With the assessment in mind, everyone was given the data regarding and his or her choices of That was gathered in results in the first team session. Team members were: • Interested • Alerted to their relationships, and • Excited by what they saw.

Step -12: New action During the team sessions, methods were utilized to work with the dilemmas the group had identified including: •Action mapping the new job tracking system, including time lines, concretizing processes, benefits and pressure points so everyone understood the implementation process and their role in it. •Identifying and mapping perceptions of ‘ us’ and ‘ them’ and refining who to go to for what •A new seating plan within the new work- station configuration using the criterion ‘ who would I want to sit near so I can be more productive. ’Step -13: New data gathering as a result of new action In the final team development session the second assessment of the relationships using the same criterion as earlier was used. This was done, with everyone in the room, seeing one another and making their choices.

The results of the new data gathering showed three key developments. Firstly, 12 group members increased the number of choices they made. Secondly, fifteen of the 17 had more mutual choices than three months earlier. Thirdly and most compelling were that 13 of the 17 team members had nine or more mutual choices within the group.

Results indicate team members:

- Became more expansive in their choices
- Were perceived to be more available to others to assist in solving work related problems
- Increased their acceptance of people's different roles and their inter-relatedness, and
- Had greater willingness to help each other.
- Noticeably, each of the team leaders and the manager had more mutual choices. The manager and team leaders were more alert to and available to problem solve amongst themselves and with others, and were perceived to be so. As a result of this work, team members became more open with each other and quickly took on the notion of working together better, leading everyone towards the results both they and their manager wanted. The increase in mutual relationships enabled problems to be solved more readily.
- Team leaders felt more enabled to solve problems with staff rather than come up with all the answers themselves.

Everyone had greater confidence in both their specific contribution and their collaborative relationships with others.

- They felt better informed and involved with innovations and developments within the new group