

IMPROVING THE PROCESS OF TEAM EVOLUTION

Table of Contents

<i>NORMS, CULTURE & INDIVIDUALS</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTING</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>CONCLUSION</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>REFERENCES</i>	<i>9</i>
<i>APPENDIX A</i>	<i>10</i>

The traditional team development process of forming, storming, norming, performing and maturation has been studied extensively over the years. It is a common understanding that for teams to realize their true potential, they must first, at some point in their development lifecycle, pass through each of the five stages. Depending on the existing relationships of the team members, and their experiences with past teams, the journey through these stages could range from one meeting to several months per stage. A psychological contract can be used to improve the team development process.

Group learning occurs as the process of norm establishment occurs. The total of these often times informal group learning's, combined with the implicit assumptions made by each member, can be thought of as the group's culture.

NORMS, CULTURE & INDIVIDUALS

As individuals come together and attempt to achieve a common goal, the individuals become a group and begin to form common assumptions about itself and norms of conduct of operation. A norm can be defined as a set of assumptions or expectations held by the members of a group or organization concerning what kind of behavior is right or wrong, good or bad, appropriate or inappropriate, allowed or disallowed. Norms are generally never formally written or verbalized, however, over time members will be able to state the norms of their groups. For example, group norms may resemble:

“Meetings start on time, so members should arrive on time.”

“Members should be totally honest in meetings.”

“Swearing or foul language should not be used in the group.”

“The leader always speaks first, then others build on his/her ideas.”

“We should be informal in the group, use first names.”

“We should reach a consensus and not fall back on voting.”

Group learning takes place as the process of norm establishment occurs. The total of these often times informal group learning's, combined with the implicit assumptions made by each member, can be thought of as the group's culture. Often times the best way to observe group culture is during group discussions. For instance, in a problem solving session, a manager or other influential employee makes a suggestion to the group. Another member argues or responds with an alternate idea. If the manager reacts unfavorably, and attempts to make the suggestion an order, a norm of leader authority has been set. If the manager encourages further dialog on the issue, the norm of total group involvement is being set. It is the meeting to meeting interactions and exercises that establish group norms leading to the development of a team culture. Verbalized norms, or those written down, are considered explicit. In one organization I worked with, the following explicit norms were posted in each meeting room.

All team members will:

1. Be totally honest,
2. Maintain total amnesty,
3. Actively listen to others,
4. Keep to the meeting agenda
5. Come prepared
6. Participate.

Norms seldomly spoken of, if spoken of at all, are considered implicit. Implicit norms, because they are based on assumptions, pose the greatest threat to the potential of the group evolving into a team. Even explicit norms pose challenges to group-team evolution if the norms are not shared equally by all group members. The development of mutually agreed upon explicit norms will form the foundation for a group culture that will allow the group to efficiently evolve into a high performing team.

If enough members share in this wait-and-see attitude, the group will spend excessive amounts of time in the storming and/or norming phases, and never fully develop the true potential of the team.

It has been discussed that team dynamics revolve around the basic concepts of commonality and diversity, communications and coordination, and confirmation and renewal (Felkins 1993). Felkins states the building blocks for a successful team start with the understanding and appreciation of both the commonality of “shared values, norms, and objectives of working together”, and the “diversity that broadens the team’s perspective, helping them to be more innovative, and integrating each person’s unique talents into a more dynamic group synergy.”

Along with understanding the issues of team commonality and diversity, the group must work through and come to a consensus on individual needs and group goals. Schein (1988) discusses the need for “enough meeting time to be allocated to permit members to explore what they really want to get from the group.” Often times, new group members become preoccupied with the concern that the groups goals and objectives will not coincide with their individual goals and needs. As a result, members may take a wait-and-see approach toward committing themselves fully to the group. If enough members share in this wait-and-see attitude, the group may never fully develop the true potential of a team. At best, the group will go along, probably in a leadership-centered direction, under the facade of a functioning team, only to return to chaos and turmoil as group efforts are stifled by inactive and frustrated members. At worst, the group will never establish an action orientation and disband leaving the ex-members with a negative impression of teams.

Essentially, the ultimate objective of the teaming process is the improvement of individual human quality eventually resulting in improvements in corporate profitability.

Teams are not teams without individuals. A critical element to developing a strong team culture, is first understanding individual goals and objectives. Before individuals become committed to a teams objectives, they must feel their personal goals align with the goals of the team. Herein lies another benefit of the teaming process, employee development. For many years, the Japanese have successfully managed QC circles based on the fundamental principle of human potential development. The Japanese have long believed the objectives of teams are not limited to enhancing basic job related skills and improving corporate profitability, but extends into raising the general quality of the employee enabling employees to strive for self-actualization. Essentially, the ultimate objective of the teaming process is the improvement of individual human quality eventually resulting in corporate profitability improvements. To facilitate the evolution from individuals to groups to teams, it is imperative to understand the individuals goals and align them with objectives of the team.

In dealing with the issues of norms, culture, commonality and diversity, and alignment of individual goals with group goals, time needs to be invested early in the developmental stages to allow members to verbalize their feelings toward the teaming process. A psychological contract can be used to facilitate this discussion, and allow members to better understand where potential teaming road blocks lie.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACTING

A psychological contract serves as an effective tool to smooth the often experienced discontinuity found in groups as they attempt to transition into teams. A psychological contract is an implicit agreement formed between each team member, and the team itself. A properly defined psychological contract, based on honesty and truth, will allow for the alignment of the teams

objectives with those of the individual members. Like any legal contract, this contract deals with the expectations of two (or more) parties and lays the boundaries for a working arrangement.

Customer service is basically the customers perception of what he or she has received. It is simply the difference between what is provided to the customer and what was expected by the customer.

However, the psychological contract is unlike a legal contract in that it is based in a dynamic changing relationship that is continually being negotiated. Psychological contracting allows the team member to openly discuss his or her expectations of the teaming process and lets the team member state what he or she is willing to contribute to the teaming process. Member expectations alignment is similar to the concept of customer service and satisfaction. To understand customer service, it is important to understand the level of customer satisfaction resulting from a product or service is not a tangible entity, and actually differs from customer to customer. Customer service is basically the customer's perception of what he or she has received. It is simply the difference between what is provided to the customer and what was expected by the customer. Therefore, customer satisfaction and customer service will vary from customer to customer and depend greatly on their past experiences and preconceived expectations. Similar to customer service, a successful teaming process will meet the often varied needs and expectations of individual team members. However, before the teaming process can attempt to satisfy team members, the individual needs and expectations must be shared and understood by all parties involved in the process of developing the team.

A psychological contract outlines how you perceive your role as a team member, how you perceive others as team members, and what you are willing to put into the teaming process to make it successful. A fundamental psychological contract is structured around 8 questions and/or statements which are addressed individually by each team member.

1. When working as a team, the following things bother me...
2. I have the following specific expectations about my teammates...
3. The results I expect from this team are... and thus my work expectations are...
4. I have the following ideas on how we can discipline ourselves...
5. In case someone in our group is not carrying their load, I will...
6. In case anyone believes I am not carrying my load, I expect them to...
7. When we run into a conflicting situation, I... When facing ambiguity, I...
8. I will do the following three things to make this a successful team experience...

Openly and honestly developing group responses to these 8 questions will assist in establishing a consensus toward how the group process will operate and allow team members to better handle the ambiguity often encountered throughout the teaming process. The following example provides insight into the psychological contract application.

EXAMPLE: Psychological Contracting Application

The pursuit of my MBA entailed my participation on numerous group projects. Upon reflecting on the results from the different groups I began to wonder why some group experiences were more successful and rewarding than others. The conclusion I reached was the more successful group projects incorporated the use of a psychological contract early on in the group development process.

I was first introduced to the benefits of psychological contracting by Dr. Kenneth Murrell in Organizational Behavior & Development. This experiential learning setting was group intensive while providing the individual an infinite learning opportunity restricted only by the element of time. The group I was working with agreed to develop an in-class presentation allowing the audience to become an active part of the presentation. The group had been meeting for several weeks and was, in my opinion, slowly progressing toward our objectives. I had observed that several members were losing interest and others were becoming frustrated. Personally, I was becoming disenchanted with the group and our progress to date. It was at that time that the group made their second attempt at the group psychological contract, that greatly improved both the groups performance and the satisfaction of the individual members. Our first contract was made during the groups forming stage and, as it turned out, was not based on peoples true feelings and expectations but rather their desires to want to be part of the group and not rock-the-boat. The revision, however was based on peoples true feelings and expectations toward the team. In discussing the 8 points of the contract openly and honestly, the members became more familiar with each other (socialization) and grew to respect and appreciate the varied backgrounds of the diverse membership. Simply put, in using open and honest dialog in developing a psychological contract, individual expectations were verbalized in the discussions allowing teams members the opportunity to:

1. voice their feelings and concerns with the group, thereby increasing the potential for buy-in to the process by members, and
2. adjust their individual expectations accordingly to keep them from becoming disappointed with the results of the team process.

Upon completion of the groups revised psychological contract, (Appendix A), all members were satisfied with the direction of the group and how the individual personalities and interests would be used to maximize the full potential of the group. As a result, this was one of the more successful group/team experiences I encountered.

CONCLUSION

As a group performs the exercise of establishing a psychological contract and openly and honestly addresses the 8 contracting questions, norms are explicitly developed. The time spent up front reviewing these issues allows members to get their feelings and expectations out on the table leading to established team norms that are understood, if not agreed to by all members. Psychological contracting is an ever changing mental understanding of what is expected of the team as well as its members in the dynamic environment of teaming. Discussing and understanding the feelings raised during the contracting will allow members to better address the ambiguity and confusion often times encountered in a shift from managers to leaders and individuals to teams.

REFERENCES

Felkins, P. K., B. J. Chakiris, and K. N. Chakiris, *Change Management: A Model For Effective Organizational Performance*, Quality Resources, New York, 1993.

Murrell, K. L., Class discussion on psychological contracting, MAN 6711: Organizational Behavior and Development, University of West Florida, August, 1993.

Schein, E. H., *Process Consultation, Volume I, Its Role in Organization Development*, Addison-Wesley, New York, 1988.

Yoshida, K., "The Joy of Work: Optimizing Service Quality Through Education and Training," *Quality Progress*, November 1993.

APPENDIX A

PSYCHOLOGICAL CONTRACT EXAMPLE

1. When working as a team, the following things bother me...
 - A dictatorship. Dictating actions to others.
 - Not doing ones share. Getting stuck with someone's work.
 - Attempts to dominate, frequent interruptions, shooting from the hip.
 - Not listening or contributing to the group discussions.
2. I have the following specific expectations about my teammates...
 - Everyone should contribute the same amount of effort.
 - Complete actions on time.
 - To be punctual.
 - To be considerate of others on the team.
 - To keep an open mind.
 - Work hard and use meeting time constructively.
3. The results I expect from this team are... and thus my work expectations are...
 - To work as hard as the team deems necessary.
 - Put forth enough effort to determine what I enjoy.
4. I have the following ideas on how we can discipline ourselves...
 - To schedule weekly meetings and have shadow members who are accountable for another team member and their assignment.
 - Don't, discipline should be internal due to different views on what is right and wrong.
 - Have the team confront the problem in a positive non-threatening manner.
 - Warn the person verbally, first, second a written warning, finally, ejection from the team.
5. In case someone in our group is not carrying their load, I will...
 - Confront them to make sure everything is all right.
 - Mention our concern to them and the group.
 - Attempt to find out why. Perhaps expectations are too high. Try to help.
6. In case anyone believes I am not carrying my load, I expect them to...
 - To be confronted so we can discuss it.
 - Point out where specifically, attempt to help.
7. When we run into a conflicting situation, I... When facing ambiguity, I...
 - We want the group to get together and discuss how we can solve this in the best interest of the group.
 - Discuss and rectify or settle.
 - Openly discuss and compromise from both sides. Decide what to do.
 - Address the conflicting situation. Clarify the ambiguous situation.
8. I will do the following three things to make this a successful team experience...
 - Be open for suggestions and change
 - Do my part as a team member
 - Do what is required and expected
 - Support, criticize (constructively) and encourage.
 - Compromise, Try