



Functional versus dysfunctional team change: Problem diagnosis and structural feedback for self-managed teams

Michael D. Johnson^{a,*}, John R. Hollenbeck^b, D. Scott DeRue^c, Christopher M. Barnes^d, Dustin Jundt^e

^a University of Washington, United States

^b Michigan State University, United States

^c University of Michigan, United States

^d Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, United States

^e St. Louis University, United States

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 29 October 2010

Accepted 17 March 2013

Accepted by Richard Moreland

Keywords:

Teams

Decision making

Structure

ABSTRACT

We describe and examine three changes (personnel, process, and structure) that self-managed teams can make to remedy performance problems. We also discuss why self-managed teams may over-emphasize process and (to a lesser extent) personnel changes over structural changes. Furthermore, we describe and test two specific diagnostic feedback interventions aimed at helping teams make functional structural change. Seventy-eight 4-person teams of undergraduate students participated in two trials of a networked laboratory simulation task. All teams were initially structurally misaligned and subsequently received (a) no feedback, (b) one type of feedback only, or (c) both types of feedback. Results confirmed that structurally misaligned teams demonstrated dysfunctional change by changing process more frequently than structure, with detrimental effects for subsequent performance. When teams received the feedback interventions, however, they were more likely to change their structure and thereby improve their performance.

© 2013 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Self-managed teams have been described as “one of the most far-reaching innovations” (Alper, Tjosvold, & Law, 1998, p. 34) of work design, due to the relatively broad ability of these teams to make decisions about the way they go about their tasks. This level of autonomy is a hallmark of self-managed teams (Morgeson, 2005), and allows them to rapidly modify their task strategies to accommodate a changing environment or to remedy performance deficiencies. Indeed, many scholars have advocated the use of self-managed teams because of the flexibility afforded by this autonomy (Ancona, 1990; Kozlowski & Bell, 2003). The assumption behind this advocacy of self-managed teams is that because they are “close to the action,” self-managed teams can correctly diagnose the cause of their performance deficiencies and carry out appropriate remedies. In other words, self-managed teams should have more information about the cause of the problems they are facing, and thus will make fitting, functional changes that will solve those problems. But some scholars have questioned this assumption, suggesting that self-managed teams sometimes are not sufficiently aware of changes in their environments (Gersick

& Hackman, 1990) or make dysfunctional changes in themselves (e.g., Langfred, 2007; Manz & Sims, 1982; Polley, Van Dyne, Beyerlein, & Johnson, 1994).

If self-managed teams do indeed occasionally make dysfunctional changes, a key challenge for teams research is to explore exactly when and how such dysfunctional changes occur. We suggest that one important issue in this regard involves team *structure*: the social architecture of the team that describes how its work is organized and differentiated (Hollenbeck et al., 2002). Functionally structured teams display a highly differentiated division of labor, where each member specializes in a specific part of the team's task. In contrast, divisionally structured teams represent a low level of differentiation of labor, where each member is a generalist and can perform any part of the team's task. Consistent with structural contingency theory (Burns & Stalker, 1961), research has found that functionally structured teams perform best in predictable task environments, whereas divisionally structured teams perform best in unpredictable or rapidly changing task environments (Hollenbeck et al., 2002). This is because functionally structured teams can leverage the efficiency inherent in their differentiation of roles in predictable situations, but this efficiency breaks down when the task is constantly changing. Divisionally structured teams can leverage the flexibility inherent in members' ability to perform any of the team's tasks, which is particularly helpful when it is difficult to predict what will happen next and/or the team needs to respond quickly.

* Corresponding author. Address: Michael G. Foster School of Business, University of Washington, Box 353226, Seattle, WA 98195, United States.

E-mail address: mdj3@u.washington.edu (M.D. Johnson).

However, structural adaptation theory (Johnson et al., 2006) suggests that structural *change* is particularly problematic for teams. When team structure is misaligned with the task environment, teams typically perform poorly, but teams often find that making structural changes is difficult, due to their history of working under a different structure. We extend structural adaptation theory by suggesting that when teams are structurally misaligned, they frequently neglect to make adaptive structural changes. Instead, self-managed teams often misdiagnose the nature of their performance deficiencies as being caused by their personnel or processes, and as a result, implement dysfunctional change. Thus, our interest in this study was to examine teams whose structure was misaligned with their task environment, and determine whether they realize that misalignment was the cause for their poor performance.

Emerging work on team adaptation is reaching consensus on the *process* of team change, suggesting that teams engage in various activities after completing tasks, activities that can affect their performance in future tasks (Chen, Thomas, & Wallace, 2005; Marks, Mathieu, & Zaccaro, 2001). For example, some team research has suggested that reflecting on the team's past performance can lead them to make changes that positively affect their future performance (e.g., De Dreu, 2007). To date, however, the *content* of team change has seldom been examined. Thus, we develop a diagnostic list of possible changes that teams can make, arguing that self-managed teams can diagnose the cause of their performance deficiencies as being due to personnel, process, or structure. Then, we describe why self-managed teams are likely to neglect making structural changes. Finally, we examine two feedback interventions that might ameliorate this neglect.

Team change mechanisms

According to attribution theory (Weiner, 1980), people faced with negative or unexpected events attempt to determine both the locus and the controllability of the events, so that they can determine what caused the events and whether they can do anything to address them. Extending this to team settings, if a team is performing poorly, then its members may search for the causes of failure and if they determine that these are controllable, they will implement changes to remedy the problem. As noted by Moreland and Levine (1992), groups are motivated to make these changes the more their real group diverges from what they imagine their ideal group to be. Although there are many potential changes that teams could enact, most of the changes available to self-managed teams can be grouped into three categories: personnel, process, or structure (Campion, Medsker, & Higgs, 1993; Katzell & Guzzo, 1983).

Personnel changes

Personnel changes focus on replacing or repositioning team members. When self-managed teams face performance deficiencies, they often engage in counterfactual thinking, considering "what might have been" had they acted differently (Naquin & Tynan, 2003). This type of thinking frequently leads teams to examine the actions of individual team members, which can lead to attributing blame for the team's deficiency to one or more members (Leary & Forsyth, 1987). The attributions teams make regarding personnel may be legitimate, but they may also "scapegoat" team members who are only partially to blame (Boeker, 1992; Gamson & Scotch, 1964).

LePine and colleagues (Jackson & LePine, 2003; LePine & Van Dyne, 1998) have suggested that when diagnosing personnel problems, teams often focus on the lowest-performing member of the

team. When poor team performance is attributed to personnel issues, self-managed teams may remove the member or members who seem responsible for the team's poor performance. If the task can be performed with fewer members, then these members may not be replaced, but in other cases where the task cannot be performed with fewer members, other individuals will be selected to take over their responsibilities. Alternatively (see Moreland, 1999), teams may seek training or bring in outsiders in order to give them the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary for good team performance. Self-managed teams confronted with a performance deficiency thus have a wide variety of options if they attribute their deficiency to a personnel problem.

Process changes

Process changes focus on modifications of the methods self-managed teams use to perform their tasks. Marks et al. (2001) suggested that team processes can be divided into three categories: transition, action, and interpersonal processes. Transition processes involve reflection on previous performance and planning for future action. These processes include mission analysis (identifying tasks, constraints, and available resources), goal specification (identifying and prioritizing team objectives), and strategy formulation and planning (developing courses of action for accomplishing the team's mission). Action processes involve what teams do when actually working on their tasks, and include monitoring progress toward goals (tracking team progress), systems monitoring (tracking resources and environmental conditions), team monitoring (assisting members in need), and coordination (orchestrating the timing of team member activities). Interpersonal processes involve the way members interact with each other, and include conflict management (preemptively or reactively resolving disagreements), motivation/confidence building (generating collective efficacy and cohesion), and affect management (regulating emotional states). LePine, Piccolo, Jackson, Mathieu, and Saul (2008) meta-analyzed the extensive empirical literature on team processes and found support for these three basic processes.

Structural changes

Structural changes focus on the architecture of the differentiation and integration of labor in the team. Recent teams research has examined numerous aspects of structure, including task interdependence (Langfred, 2007), network structure (Balkundi & Harrison, 2006), centralization (Hollenbeck, Ellis, Humphrey, Garza, & Ilgen, 2011), and reward structures (Beersma et al., 2003). One particularly critical dimension of team structure is the degree of role specialization within teams (Wagner, 2000). In functionally structured teams, work is structured such that members have narrow and specialized roles, whereas in divisionally structured teams, work is structured so that members have broad and general roles. Functionally structuring a team tends to create simple jobs that have complex coordination requirements, whereas divisional structuring creates complex jobs that have simple coordination requirements (Hollenbeck et al., 2002).

Much of the literature on team structure was inspired by structural contingency theory (Burns & Stalker, 1961), which assumes that there is no best way to structure large groups (Pennings, 1992). Recent research on team structure has begun to show how alternative structures interact with the nature of the task to affect team performance (Beersma et al., 2003; DeRue, Hollenbeck, Johnson, Ilgen, & Jundt, 2008; Johnson et al., 2006; Moon et al., 2004). For example, functionally structured teams fit best in predictable environments and display greater decision-making accuracy, whereas divisionally structured teams fit best in unpredictable environments and display greater performance speed

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات