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Practicing OD

From Groups to Teams

Minahan, Matt

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Poets describe the essence of individual accomplishment in the metaphorical language of limitations confronted, expectations exceeded, boundaries challenged, and efforts unprecedented. Pragmatists, however, will assure you that, behind every great accomplishment, is a group or a team that has toiled, often in turmoil, to plan, prepare, train, organize, anticipate, simulate, even stimulate beyond yesterday's limitations toward tomorrow's new frontier.

Human history is full of magnificent accomplishments that far exceed the capacity of any one person or group, requiring interdependence among people and groups, leadership, communications, constructive norms, differentiated functions and roles, and, perhaps most importantly, the ability to understand and mobilize human behavior for a common goal.

The early 21st century finds us learning daily about new scientific breakthroughs and accomplishments. Yet, in the world of people and groups, our fundamental truths are still most powerful - with a caveat or two: "Two heads are better than one - if they can figure out how to get along with each other." "Great minds think alike - it's talking about it that's often the problem." "There's nothing wrong with this group that can't be fixed with some good leadership - or a good revolt!"

Whether the task is mapping human brain functions, or finding a cure for cancer, determining the performance measures for a task team, or planning the family Thanksgiving dinner, the efforts and ideas, interests and egos of multiple people must be organized and aligned to produce a result that is greater than the sum of its parts. In fact, groups are simultaneously one of the most prolific, yet profoundly puzzling elements of human and organizational life, which explains the push/pull, love/hate, approach/avoid reaction we have to them.

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CRITERIA	GROUPS	TEAMS
What is the purpose?	Support and develop the principles, skills and abilities of members in a chosen domain.	Accomplish a project plan that supports organization objectives.
Who belongs?	Members from one or many organizations, or not affiliated with any organization	Members of the organization.
What makes members come together?	Self-selection based on expertise or passion.	Selected and assigned by management.
What is the glue holding it together?	The passion, commitment, and identification to the chosen cause or knowledge domain.	The organization plan or the project charter.
What is the nature of the activities?	Goals are more self-generated-best if aligned with organization.	Tasks should be aligned with organizational interests. Specific goals from organization, establishing deliverables and deadlines.
How long does it last?	As long as the members have interest in building the practice and sustaining the community.	Until the project or work is completed.
What are the resources?	Information, knowledge, experience, member commitment and collaboration, etc.	People hours and work resources.

Adapted from: federalconnections.org, Communities of Practice: Connecting know-how across Government

In addition, an entire industry has grown up around the support to, and facilitation of work-based teams. OD consultants are often called upon to do team building events because of our expertise in creating and sustaining social systems. One of the best and most widely used models for developing and building teams is the Team Performance Model, developed by

Alan Drexler and David Sibbett.

The Team Performance model is built around Arthur M. Young's Theory of Process, with time across the X axis, and constraint along the Y axis. But rather than the Y scale climbing from low constraint to high constraint, in Young's model and the Team Performance Model, constraint is measured at it highest at the bottom of the Y axis, and at its lowest at the top of the Y axis. So, the earliest and latest stages -- Orientation, Trust Building, High Performance, and Renewal -- are the least constrained, and the middle stages of Goal Clarification, Commitment, and Implementation are the most constrained.

It's also important to note the pivot that occurs in the Commitment stage. The downward movement ends, the team commits to a shared vision, resources are allocated, and the team is ready for implementation.

The Team Performance Model is one of the best supported, best validated, and visually effective team tools available today. The TPM system is easy for practitioners to learn, and particularly easy for our client groups to understand and adopt. So easy, in fact, they could put us out of business! But we want our clients to be self sufficient, anyway, don't we?

For more information on the Team Performance Model, contact The Grove Consultants, www.grove.com.