

Group Observation and Analysis of a Software Company
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Introduction

1. Description of Group and Members, Purpose and Goals

Software Company A develops software for a number of industries. There are three different groups that support the main products. I observed one of these groups on two separate occasions during their weekly staff meetings.

Group and Members

The manager of this team is Cynthia, a 45 year-old white female. She is open, friendly, and supportive, and she sets a tone for a very harmonious environment.

There is a team lead named Tammy. She is a 28 year-old white female. She is a mother of very young children. Though motherhood is important to her, she values the position she holds on the team and takes her work very seriously. She seems to have found a balance between work and family.

The additional team members are support representatives. They are a fairly diverse group which includes Caucasian and African-American males and females of different ages, and openly gay members of the team. :

Purpose and Goals

According to Johnson and Johnson (2006), “a group may be defined as a number of individuals who join together to achieve a goal” (p. 5) and also “a collection of individuals whose interactions are structured by a set of roles and norms” (p. 7).

The basic purpose of this group is to support customers. The support group interacts with customers by phone and e-mail, work on their issues, escalate issues to development and other groups, update the status of the issue in the customer database, and close the issue.

Their goal is to close reported customer issues within a certain time frame. Cynthia, the manager of the group, has clearly defined the goals of each individual and the entire group, which is an important

aspect of group effectiveness (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). The metrics involved with client issues are tracked for each team member, but each group member understands that the group's success is tied to each member's individual success.

2. Stage of Group Development

The support team is a high performance group. They are able to meet their goals and be successful as a team, have fun, and also show a real concern for each other (Johnson & Johnson, 2006).

This group is in a very mature stage of development, due to the maturity and tenure (at least five years) of the group members. Over the years, the manager has intentionally selected the group members, not only for their skill sets, but also for their personalities and ability to interact with the other group members. This has facilitated a harmonious work environment and is a big reason that this group is in the stage of development of "functioning maturely and productively." At this stage of development, according to Johnson & Johnson (2006), the relationships are important to group members, the manager becomes more of a consultant, the relationships between all members and the manager continue to improve, and the group achieves a maturity and productivity.

The group works so well together that when one of the members decided to move to out of state, the other team members assisted with her client calls until her new home office was set up and she could begin to work remotely at full capacity.

Group/Team Dynamics or Processes

3. Examples of Roles of Members and the Leader

There is a great deal of social interdependence between the group members and their manager. The manager, Cynthia, is a democratic leader who fosters unity, open discussions, and two-way communication. In the status meetings, Cynthia provides an agenda and keeps the group focused on the each issue they need to discuss. It tends to be a rowdy group with lots of interaction and humor, but Cynthia finds a balance between letting the team control the meeting and staying focused on the agenda.

Tammy, the team lead, provides metrics about the group productivity. She does this in a non-confrontational way if the numbers are not as solid as she would like.

A couple of the team members are a little less talkative than the other group members, but somebody (not necessarily Cynthia) will ask them their opinions when an important issue is being discussed. All of the team members are encouraging and open. They exhibit trusting and trustworthy characteristics to each other. Two of the members are particularly nurturing to the group, making very supportive comments to other team members during their meetings.

There are no self-serving roles evident on the team. If any group members might become self-serving, the group norms would not allow that characteristic to surface. It is a very nurturing and supportive environment, and I think the group members will ensure that this environment remains intact. The group members appear to be close enough that they can have very candid discussions with each other. Because of this, there appear to be no hidden agendas.

4. Physical Setting/Environment

The physical setting and environment of the meeting was very conducive to open and candid communication. Status meetings are held in a conference room with a large round table, so nobody is sitting at the head of the table. Because of this, each team member can make direct eye contact with the others, except for the team member who works remotely and calls in.

5. Diversity

The team is a diverse group in age, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. The group is very mature, group members rely heavily on each other to be a successful group, and they appear to enjoy each other. Because of this, the diversity in this group is honored. For example, one person, who is openly gay and a staunch Democrat, is great friends with another team member, who is a staunch Republican. They joke with each other about their political beliefs, but not in a nasty or hurtful way. The youngest person in the group works well with the oldest person in the group. The women have as much of a voice as the men

do. Because of the positive environment, the diversity within the group is seen as beneficial. Because of the positive environment, the diversity within the group is seen as beneficial.

6. Nonverbal communication

The nonverbal communication with status meetings is very positive and supportive because of the harmony in the group. I did not observe any negative nonverbal communication, such as rolling the eyes or sighing. Instead, there was positive nonverbal communication, such as head nodding, strong eye contact, and giving full attention to the speaker.

7. Factors influencing Group's Viability and Success

There are many factors which influence the success of the group, from both the organization and the environment. The structure of the support department provides the foundation for the group to achieve their goals, such as computers, databases, software, an escalation point if needed, and a comfortable physical environment. The tangible needs of the group members are met.

The success of the group can be attributed to the environment or the more intangible needs of the group. Members of the group feel valued and respected. They trust one another and are trustworthy. Group members must be both trusting and trustworthy. Trusting can be defined as “the willingness to risk beneficial or harmful consequences by making oneself vulnerable to other group members” (Johnson & Johnson, 2006, p. 125). Trustworthy can be defined as “the willingness to respond to another person’s risk taking in a way that ensures that the other person will experience beneficial consequences” (Johnson & Johnson, p. 125). You can see this within the interaction of the group members during their status meetings because of body language, open discussions, direct comments, and language such as “I appreciate what you’re saying.” Group members also gave each other credit for their ideas and work, such as one team member thanking another for helping her with a difficult issue she had with a customer the week before.

Groups communicate effectively when the group members who receive the message interpret it the same way that the sender meant it (Johnson & Johnson, 2006). The team practiced good listening skills, reframed and paraphrased ideas, and made sure each team member contributed. One team member, who is usually quiet, was talking about the need to evaluate customers after a service request is closed and how they might be able to do that. Another team member reframed what he said and asked if that was what he meant. Then the rest of the group began to discuss options and strategies, and someone would check back in with the original team member to ask if that was his original vision.

The clear and effective communication within this group is a reflection of the respect that the team members have for each other. They truly care about each other and seem to be aware of any possible miscommunications.

In order for the group to effectively work and close service requests, they must work together well and communicate effectively. "Communication is the basis for all human interaction and group functioning, and it is especially important when groups of people are working toward a common goal" (Johnson & Johnson, p. 25).

The group used humor during the meeting. This made the atmosphere feel very friendly and cohesive. The humor was not adversarial or caustic, but supportive. Tammy, the mother of young children, mentioned feeling overwhelmed about a particular project. The other team members started to tease her about having nothing to do at home, so she should have plenty of time to work on her project in the evenings. To use humor effectively, there must be a strong level of trust, which this group has.

8. Conflict Strategies

There were no strong conflicts during the meetings I observed. In this supportive environment, I would imagine that any conflicts would be handled constructively. Like a family, the group members are very candid, so any conflict or potential conflict would most likely be brought into the open and addressed. There do not appear to be any hidden agendas because of this environment. The group members are most likely problem-solvers and compromising. Because there are no scarce resources, the

environment is supportive and harmonious, and the group members' roles are clearly defined, conflict is limited.

Summary

“To be effective overall, a group must do three things: achieve its goals; maintain good working relationships among members; and adapt to changing conditions in the surrounding organization, society, and world” (Johnson & Johnson, p. 24). This support team, with supportive and open management that fosters good will between team members, all of these objectives of successful teams are met. The open and friendly communication provides a basis for these team members to work toward the common goal with respect toward one another. This can provide the foundation for a team to reach a high success level, while feeling empowered and valued.

References

Johnson, D., & Johnson, F. (2006). *Joining Together: Group Theory and Group Skills*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.