



CUTTINGS...

Number 122 April 2016

Compiled and edited by Geof Cox

Welcome to spring!

This edition comes with some guidance on how to make teams work effectively, and some comments on why teams in matrix organisations need some particular consideration.

The other article gleaned from the blogs and newsletters that have crossed my desk in the last few weeks is continuing evidence that despite years of setting performance objectives and targets, people still consistently report that they don't know what they are expected to do. This time it is a global survey from Gallup. It is a phenomenon I come across all of the time. What is more worrying in this recent survey is that managers are saying the same thing. Organisations seem to continue to get even the basic communications right.

Enjoy...

Geof Cox

Why Teams don't Work

Research consistently shows that teams underperform, despite all the extra resources they have. That's because problems with coordination and motivation typically undermine the benefits of collaboration. And even when you have a strong and cohesive team, it's often in competition with other teams, and that dynamic can also get in the way of real progress. So, the belief that teams are automatically the best way to get the job done needs to be questioned.

In another article in this edition of Cuttings, the problem of coordination is multiplied enormously when people are working in matrixed organisations, needing to collaborate with multiple teams, often across multiple geographies and functions.

J. Richard Hackman, Professor of Social and Organizational Psychology at Harvard University has a new book, *Leading Teams*, which looks at why teams fail, and what can be done to avoid it. Most of the time, his research shows, team members don't even agree on what the team is supposed to be doing; they can't even agree on who is on the team. Getting agreement is the leader's job, and if the leader isn't disciplined about managing who is on the team and how it is set up, the odds are slim that a team will do a good job.

"If you're going to lead a team, first make sure that you know who's on it." In a study of more than 120 top teams around the world,

In this edition

Why Teams Don't Work - an interview with Professor Richard Hackman on his work with top teams.

People don't know what is expected of them - more evidence that our target setting processes don't work.

Matrix teams are everywhere - most people are now working in some form of matrix, so need a different way of collaborating.

Details of **Public Courses** and **Book Sales**, and **Snippets** to provoke your thinking and reflection

Snippets

A collection of thought provokers and quotations...

"I have no question that a team can generate magic. But don't count on it."

J. Richard Hackman

"The place to improve the world is first in one's own heart and head and hands, and then work outward from there."

Robert M. Pirsig

"A dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality."

John Lennon

"Beauty awakens the soul to act."

Dante

"And in the end, it's not the years in your life that count. It's the life in

fewer than 10% agreed about who was on it. And these were teams of senior executives! Often the CEO is responsible for this fuzziness of team boundaries, putting people on the team for purely political reasons, or fearing to exclude. So you get a dysfunctional team.

Hackman points out that putting together a team involves some ruthless decisions about membership; not everyone who wants to be on the team should be included. He cites the case of a large financial services firm where the CFO wasn't allowed on the executive committee because he was disinclined toward teamwork, and was unwilling to work at finding collective solutions. He stayed in his role because he was a truly able executive, but he was not allowed on the senior executive team. In the end the CFO was much happier, and the team functioned much better without him.

"A team needs a compelling direction."

There is no one right way to set a direction; but however it's done, setting a direction is emotionally demanding because it always involves the exercise of authority, and that inevitably arouses angst and ambivalence—for both the person exercising it and the people on the receiving end. Leaders who are emotionally mature are willing and able to move toward anxiety-inspiring situations as they establish a clear, challenging team direction. But in doing so, a leader sometimes encounters resistance so intense that it can place his or her job at risk.

"Teams that work harmoniously are not necessarily better and more productive." In a study conducted on symphony orchestras, grumpy orchestras actually played together slightly better than orchestras in which all the musicians were really quite happy. That's because the cause-and-effect is the reverse of what most people believe: We feel good when we're productive and we've actually achieved something good together, not the other way around. So, the mood after a performance says more about how well the team performed than the mood beforehand.

"Bigger teams are not better than small ones despite having more resources." As a team gets bigger, the number of links that need to be managed among members goes up at an accelerating, almost exponential rate. It's managing the links between members that gets teams into trouble. (*See the article below and Cuttings 66 "The Chickens are in Charge"*). Big teams usually just waste everybody's time. Having a huge senior leadership team that includes all the CEO's direct reports may be worse than having no team at all.

"Teams that stay together achieve the best performance" But they need to guard against becoming complacent by having a deviant*, someone who challenging the tendency to want too much homogeneity; someone who can stand back and say, "Wait a minute, why are we even doing this at all?" Teams with deviants outperform teams without them.

Hackman's 5 conditions for effective teams:

1: Teams must be real. People have to know who is on the team and who is not. It's the leader's job to make that clear.

your years."

Abraham Lincoln

"The foolish man seeks happiness in the distance; the wise grows it under his feet."

James Oppenheim

"We must always change, renew, rejuvenate ourselves; otherwise, we harden."

Goethe

"In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks."

John Muir

"Sometimes your joy is the source of your smile, but sometimes your smile can be the source of your joy."

Thich Nhat Hanh

"Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future."

Paul Boese

"We don't see things as they are, we see things as we are."

Anaïs Nin

"Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin."

Mother Teresa

"To teach is to learn twice."

Joseph Joubert

"Nothing is impossible to a willing heart."

John Heywood

"A good listener is not only popular everywhere, but after a while he gets to know something."

Wilson Mizner

"It is not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves."

Sir Edmund Hillary

"This time, like all times, is a very good one, if we know what to do with it."

2: Teams need a compelling direction. Members need to know, and agree on, what they're supposed to be doing together. Unless a leader articulates a clear direction, there is a real risk that different members will pursue different agendas.

3: Teams need enabling structures. Teams that have poorly designed tasks, the wrong number or mix of members, or fuzzy and unenforced norms of conduct invariably get into trouble.

4: Teams need a supportive organisation. The organizational context—including the reward system, the human resource system, and the information system—must facilitate teamwork.

5: Teams need expert coaching. Most executive coaches focus on individual performance, which does not significantly improve teamwork. Teams need coaching as a group in team processes—especially at the beginning, midpoint, and end of a team project.

* *This is one of the Team Process Roles identified in my book Ready-Aim-Fire Problem Solving, see below for details on how to order a copy.*

USEFUL LINKS

[Click here](#) to read an interview with J. Richard Hackman and Diane Coutu of HBR.

As well as my book of team working, Ready-Aim-Fire Problem Solving which can be ordered through the website links below, **New Directions** offer workshops and coaching on team development. For more information [Click here](#).

People don't know what is expected of them

Kevan Hall, CEO of Global Integration, quotes a recent Gallup survey in a recent blog. It found that in over 550 organisations, only half of employees said that they understand what is expected of them at work. What is potentially worse is that the managers of these people were equally unclear about expectations of them.

My own experience, in line with Hall's experience tallies with this. We are not surprised by this finding.

Hall quotes an exercise where participants in their workshops are asked to write down their personal key goals together with those of their organisation and department. Very few of them are able to do this. And in one particular example with 100 managers in a global bank he identified that they were following nearly 20 different strategies – and only one of them was correct. The most popular answer for this group was a strategy that had been set by a leader who had left the organisation four years before.

Hall identifies the sources of this problem partly an issue of poor communication of goals, and partly about changes to the nature of organisations today. Senior leaders consistently underestimate how difficult it is to get comprehension and understanding of goals. Sending out a PowerPoint presentation isn't enough. People need the time to

Ralph Waldo Emerson

"A leader is a dealer in hope."

Napoleon Bonaparte

"Do not say, 'it is morning', and dismiss it with a name of yesterday. See it for the first time as a newborn child that has no name."

Rabindranath Tagore

"For myself, I am an optimist - it does not seem to be much use being anything else."

Sir Winston Churchill

Sometimes the heart sees what is invisible to the eye."

H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

"Realize that now, in this moment of time, you are creating. You are creating your next moment. That is what's real."

Sara Paddison

Matrix teams are everywhere

Another Kevan Hall bog reports that some form of matrix is the way of working of choice for the vast majority of organisations according to a recent McKinsey article "Revisiting the matrix organisation" that identifies that 84% were at least slightly matrixed.

The reason for the high numbers are partly due to the use of the term matrix to describe "horizontal" working relationships, not just multiple reporting lines. Horizontal working cuts across the traditional vertical silos of functions and geography, and, whether you have formal reporting lines are not, you are working in a matrix way.

Multiple team membership has big implications for prioritisation and collaboration. If you are working on

discuss and internalise the goals and locate them within their personal change story.

And in a multi-dimensional organisation where people have multiple bosses, multiple reporting lines and are part of multiple virtual teams, the individual job holder is the only person who has full clarity on their goal and roles. If they seek clarity from just one of their reporting lines they will probably be talking to someone with only part of the picture.

In helping to increase clarity, another Gallup study noted that only around 12% of employees said that their manager helps them to set work priorities, and performance goals - which may be OK if it is true that the individual is the best person to set their own goals and to know their own role. However, if the organisation goals are not clear, this will mean every individual doing their own thing - chaos. So, most people do need some guidance and framework.

Modern organisations are more complex and more ambiguous. There is a need for trade-offs and conflicts. So, we need to give the individuals at the point of intersection of this complexity the skills, the information and the autonomy to make decisions about their goals and priorities - which includes clarity about organisation strategy. If we don't we are setting ourselves up for regular escalation for operational decisions, and we continue to peddle confusion. Poor performance will continue as a result.

USEFUL LINKS

[Click here](#) to access the original article by Kevan Hall

New Directions provides workshops and consultancy services in performance management and corporate strategy. [Click here](#) for more information.

Public Courses 2016

New Directions runs a small number of public training programmes in association with partners. 2016 dates are below.

Human Competency and Capability Development

A 4 day course in strategic human resource management in oil and gas .

Kuala Lumpur 18-21 October

International Oil & Gas Executive Programme

An 5 day workshop in strategic management for the Oil and Gas industry.

Kuala Lumpur 24-28 October

USEFUL LINKS

[New Directions consultancy and training services](#)

four teams, each with 10 members, then you have a huge collaborative load to maintain just to stay in contact with people. Each of these people will also send you emails and other forms of information and invite you to meetings.

This brings to mind the lead article in *Cuttings 66: "The Chickens are in Charge"* - "It's like pulling a stagecoach with chickens. You can do it, but the reins management will kill you." The more teams you are in the more hands you need to hold onto the reins!

The key is to streamline the communication and collaboration. Regular, shorter meetings with standardised agendas to keep track of what is happening; grow delegation and commitment through an understanding of role and purpose; and fostering cross-team working that does not need to be fed through the centre.

USEFUL LINKS

[Click here](#) to read the the article by Kevan Hall

[Click here](#) for more information about how New Directions helps matrix organisations.

Cuttings

Cuttings is a bi-monthly collection of ideas and comments published elsewhere which have attracted my attention over the past couple of months. It is designed for readers who are interested in individual, organisation and management development and is free. It has been published continuously for more than 20 years by *New Directions*, an international network of consultants and trainers who work together to learn, research, design and provide consulting and training in individual, management, and organisation development.

USEFUL LINKS

[Past issues of Cuttings](#)

Book sales

Getting Results Without Authority is available at the special price of **£10.00**

Ready-Aim-Fire Problem Solving is priced at **£7.00**

Bundle both titles for **£15.00**

Price includes p&p in the UK, for deliveries outside the UK add £1.00.

[Click here to go to the secure *Online Shop*.](#)

[New Directions website](#)
[Getting Results Without Authority](#)

Contact details

T: +44 (0)117 968 1451

M: +44 (0)7753 626284

Skype: GeofCox.NewDirections

E: geofcox@newdirections.uk.com

P: 26a Downleaze, Bristol BS9 1LZ, UK

© Copyright 2016 by New Directions Ltd. The contents are the property of the publisher but may be used if the publisher is identified and if copies of such use are sent to the publisher.