

Organisational Behaviour Assignment

Why do some groups function effectively whilst others are dysfunctional? In your answer, draw on theories and concepts from across the module, and illustrate your views with examples from organisation(s) you are familiar with or have researched.

Introduction

The use of groups within organisations has increased on a global scale in recent years.

This fact alone suggests that a group demographic confers many tangible benefits to an organisation. A 'group' in this instance is a set of employees brought together with the aim that their individual skills will lead to higher productivity when combined, than if they were each working as a separate entity. The employees may have similar skills in a specific field of the company's activity, for example the group of Research and Development employees brought together for the focus groups involved in the development of the new Windows OS Vista. Groups may also have contrasting skills that enable them to cooperate towards a common goal, for example; a group of interdisciplinary employees may be assembled to perform a task that requires multi-departmental cooperation but cannot facilitate indirect communication between departments i.e. they don't have to time to communicate indirectly. For example when the Environmental Protection Agency is commissioned to perform a survey; it assembles a group of geologists, hydrologists, ecologists etc to go and assess the site. The dynamics and psychology of groups has been well studied and documented especially by Tuckman and Gersick whom

we will focus upon in due course. The organisation of the staff within a company can have a massive impact upon how the company functions and on its productivity, so it is important for businesses to examine and review their organisational behaviour. Why does the organisation of individuals into goal orientated groups yield such rewards and what are the possible downsides to this organisation strategy? These are the questions this essay intends to address.

Factors and Processes which Influence Group Effectiveness and Dysfunction

An Effective Group

- Task orientation – an effective group is more likely to stay focused on its aims and targets than any one individual alone and will be much more focused than a dysfunctional group. This could be achieved through organisation of goals and targets for the group as they progress through a task.
- Motivation through hierarchical flattening – the introduction of equality by the integration of management within the group structure. The breakdown of barriers between support staff and management can lead to a more relaxed working environment. Also management within the group can maintain the focus and orientation of the group.

Groups act as a form of social control – norms and protocols are learned more quickly by new employees if they have to associate closely with

others. An effective group will be trained to introduce a new member to the ethos of the organisation quickly so the new member wastes no time 'settling in'

- Group norms can serve to facilitate goal achievement – if each group member knows how he/she is to behave and what is expected of them, then greater productivity is sure to ensue
- If appropriate rewards are strategically offered to the highest performing group then competition will increase and therefore overall productivity will increase.
- In an effective group the aims and targets are made clear to all members, no one is confused or left without a task, nor are tasks duplicated.
- Based upon Social Identity Theory and the natural desire to maintain positive self concept; people like to identify with high status groups and subsequently will work hard to stay associated with them.
- The stereotyping of out-group factors can facilitate in-group unity
- High expectations placed upon a group can lead its members to function more effectively. Some possible benefits of high expectations are:
 - Independence and trust
 - Increased responsibility
 - Room for creativity
 - Praise
 - Seek comments / opinions
 - Overlook minor setbacks

- A group working effectively will facilitate cultural differences, for example, Americans and French tend to prefer not to work in a group whereas the Japanese do.
- The creation of an effective group may be due to its members living and socialising together, for example; the Disneyland case – employees live together in apartment style accommodation; this creates a sense of group harmony and also defines each member's role in the strict hierarchy within the organisation.

A Dysfunctional Group

- One of the biggest flaws in a dysfunctional group is likely to be social loafing; the responsibility of each individual is diminished, they each feel they can get away with a lower amount of work than if they were working alone. This could be due to laziness on the part of the employees or incorrect organisational behaviour on the part of the employer, for example having groups consisting of too many members or not allocating the right amount of work to a group.
- Group norms can hinder goal achievement, especially if a member of the group is recalcitrant. In a group where norms are unknown or deviated from by certain employees; instead of accepting and adhering to the norms, it takes longer for new members to join in and be accepted.

- If a new member of the group joins, it will take time for them to learn the group norms, dysfunctional groups may be the result of regular membership reshuffling
- Unclear instructions or briefs provided by higher authority could lead to a team performing poorly.
- A dysfunctional group may be the result of combining contrasting cultures; an example of this is the fusion of Chrysler and Daimler-Benz – the two cultures clashed and groups of the two sets of employees did not get along.
- Motivational incentives can cause disharmony among group members, if members of the group are pitted against one another in competition this can often backfire and be counterproductive with the faster workers slowing down to keep pace with their slower working friends
- Competition for leadership can lead to loss of focus and productivity (see Tuckman and Gersick's models)
- A social phenomenon called groupthink can result from certain conditions, usually when the group is successful and has existed for a while. The symptoms of groupthink are:
 - Pressure to conform applied by other members of the group – this can stifle individual input.
 - Self censorship – a group member may hold their tongue if they feel they are in the minority (Asch's and Milgram's studies of conformity to norms illustrate the effects of self censorship perfectly)

- Feeling of unanimity and invulnerability – individuals in a group, especially a successful one, may develop an arrogance that could lead the group in rash and risky directions
- A group may become dysfunctional if it is under threat; this is called the crisis factor and can panic group members into rash choices and sub-par work.
- A group can deteriorate in performance if it is rife with negative stereotyping – the perception of a whole individual based upon specific attributes has implications for selection, promotion and performance evaluation.
- If individuals do not feel pride in a group then they will attempt to change the status of the group and try to detach themselves from it
- A group may become dysfunctional if low expectations are placed upon them. Some negative impacts of low expectations include:
 - Decreased responsibility
 - Directive instructions
 - Emphasis of mistakes
 - Less attention paid to comments / suggestions

To predict how groups behave; certain psychological models can be applied; specifically Tuckman's model of group development and Gersick's punctuated equilibrium model. The following is a representation of Tuckman and Gersick's models superimposed:

A group working effectively will progress through the stages quickly to the performing stage after resolving any leadership disputes and establishing

norms early on. Effective groups will contain members that have complementary skills and personalities, a group may work well if they have been formed for a long time or if they have worked together before as this greatly diminishes the effects of stages 1 – 3 of Tuckman's model. A dysfunctional group will spend longer on the earlier stages i.e. not performing, this could be due to a number of factors either attributable to the individuals within the group or the management that assembled the group. The management may have chosen individuals that are not suited to the task; they may not possess the necessary skills, or have little cooperation or leadership qualities. It could simply be due to the fact that the group members do not get along socially; this can lead to lower productivity so it may be wise to form a group of individuals of prior acquaintance. This could, however, have a negative impact if the colleagues have a social relationship then they may not focus upon the task in hand.

Conclusions

Many factors and processes that influence group effectiveness or dysfunction have been highlighted in the main section of this essay. Also included are relevant models to explain the dynamics of groups. The question posed in the

title is a complex one and one which organisations should consider carefully when assembling and structuring any group.

