

TEAMWORK – A REFLECTIVE SELF ANALYSIS – OLCAY SIVAS

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The idea of teamwork, whether theoretically conceptualised or not, has been around since the dawn of human civilisation. As inherently social beings, we have come together throughout the ages to accomplish together what one single person may not alone. Some (e.g. Nowak, 2006) have argued that this has been a reciprocal process and that the advantages conferred by cooperation and mutual assistance have led to and influenced the evolution of social norms. With this in mind it might be stated that 'the team', even as differentially conceptualised in different societies (e.g. the family, tribe or other unit) is the fundamental building block of society and civilisation.

In its most basic form a team consists of two or more people working together to achieve a defined outcome. In theoretical form, it necessarily conceptualises interpersonal processes occurring between team members and frameworks account for the integration of individuals and the factors which affect these processes (Hackman., 2012).

2.0 FINDINGS AND MY ROLE WITHIN TEAMS

Many models of team building and function have been developed and evolved over the years but perhaps the most dominant have been the Tuckman model (Tuckman & Jensen, 1977), the Punctuated-Equilibrium model (Gersick, 2017) and the Tubbs model (Tubbs, 2004). While beyond the scope of this article to explore these in detail, they have informed many of my decision making processes and are listed for their influence.

The exploration of theoretical concepts behind team building has not only precipitated introspection of my role within teams but also has allowed me to explore how I approach interpersonal issues in wider life.

I currently work part time in a fast-food outlet where I am frequently required to deputise in what could be described as a managerial or shift leader role. This number of employees on any given night might range between five on a weekday to eight on a busy weekend with a number of different roles and positions to coordinate. Not only do I have to manage my own role as a grill and pizza chef but coordinate the work and more importantly the timing of the tasks carried out by others to ensure that everyone's efforts are synchronised. It is with this role that I would most theoretically identify my role within a team, I would consider myself a natural yet sensitive leader who is empathic towards the needs and capabilities of those under my employ.

Becoming acquainted with formal team work theory not only has contemporary relevance in my role but allows me to think in 'hindsight' about my interpersonal relationships. The employees employed by the business come from varied backgrounds, not only socio-economic but cultural as well. There are native British employees, foreign such as myself and those of mixed heritage. First and foremost I believe it is a sensitivity to the different personalities present that has allowed me to succeed in my role.

According to research carried out by Forbes (Tracey Bower., 2021), empathy might be described as

the most important characteristic of any leader. Being able to emotionally relate to others allows me to view their work 'through their eyes' and offer advice and instruction in a way that is most effective for them to follow.

Another characteristic that I believe to be effective is that of humility. While this has been characterised a double-edged sword (Zapata & Haynes-Jones., 2019) in the sense that it might be perceived as a lesser ability to carry forward an idea or action, in my experience it has helped to facilitate employee respect in that they know that I will admit my mistakes and that I will not put my ego above and beyond the needs of the business. I define my managerial role as being solely about doing what's best for the business and not about making myself look good.

Another tool I have found useful is The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument. Interpersonal tension and conflict is an inherent part of any team process. Teams often involve substantially different personalities and sometimes reconciliation only occurs after the conflict has taken place (reference).

Some members of a team, and this is something I have noticed in my workplace, are convinced that their method of doing something is the only way forward and adopt a defensive posture when confronted with an alternative. Being able to reconcile different personalities has required me to adopt a reflexive and adaptive approach that both engages with the positives that the person in question is trying to convey while at the same time harmonising their shortcomings with the overall needs of the business, a view I believe summarised by Tannenbaum et al (1992).

Similarly, when a new staff member enters the business, I have noticed the problem is two-fold. They are both inexperienced in working with the new team and also come with their own pre-conceived ideas of what it is like to work in a team. The first issue is often overcome with time as they find their place but the second can be more challenging and it is here that I find the conflict model both interesting and useful. I find myself using it to understand their personality type and then adjusting my posture accordingly. For example, when a new member recently joined, he was quiet and unassuming, a personality I would describe as both avoidant and accommodating. Not without his talents however I sought to encourage his confidence and assertiveness to the point that he is now a valued member of our team who feels free to share his opinions and ideas for the greater good.

3.0 CONCLUSIONS

Teamwork, while on the surface might seem a natural and organic conclusion to the groupings of people, it is a far more nuanced and complicated matter than people might initially think. It often involves competing personalities and ideas and their reconciliation and harmonisation is key to the successful functioning of the group. In my current role, I have always sought balance and encouraged active participation of all members while maintaining that no one person should rise above another.

In future I would like to build upon what I perceive to be my positive attributes and develop further my confidence in managing difficult personality types. It is with both further theoretical study and experience in practical application I believe I will accomplish these goals and my continued studies will be an inherent part of this process.

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