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### **The Project Team: Features, Effectiveness and Leadership**

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## The Project Team: Features, Effectiveness and Leadership

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### *Abstract*

*The project team that is responsible for providing flexibility and innovation to this structure in order to enable organizations to remain successful (1). The very nature of the project team's work underpins a collective task much more complex than that assumed by other types of work teams. The aim of this paper is to explore the main factors that determine the project team effectiveness. The research methodology was the literature review. The main finding reveals that the organizational structure of projects and the project team should not be considered as a panacea for all problems of organizational effectiveness.*

**Keywords:** *team, project team, effectiveness, leadership.*

### **1. Introduction**

Work teams play a crucial role in introducing ongoing improvements in the organization, as all organizations operate and manage on the basis of strategies, of a stated mission, on planning goals, which generally make individuals rarely isolate from their peers.

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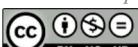
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## 2. Theoretical Background

A work team is a working group made up of members that influence each other to achieve a common goal; Not all groups in the organization form teams, but all teams are groups; The group-to-team translation requires group members to help each other voluntarily to meet the organization's goal [2].

During 1980-1990, new references appeared regarding the notion of working group and working team. Thus, in 1986, J. Adair claimed that the work team is more than a group of people with a common goal, its superiority stemming from the fact that individual contributions are considered to be complementary [3]. J. Adair claimed that „the team is effective if its members can work as a team, contributing rather to a succession of activities than to a common task requiring their presence in a certain place and at a certain point in time” [4]

In 2001, Jean - Francois Leroy defines the working team by specifying that it "comprises two or more people aware of their positive interdependence, striving to achieve shared goals, interacting in the pursuit of these goals, and aware of who is or not a member of the team, assuming roles or specific functions in action". In 2003, according to some French authors, it has been demonstrated that there are at least three reasons that lead managers to build working teams: to improve the individual effectiveness of team members and the overall effectiveness of organizations and to improve the efficiency of production units.

The team reunites features that include and overlay the group characteristics, through the specific effect of teamwork, that of generating positive synergy in a coordinated effort and leading to performance, as a sum of individual contributions.

In the literature, there is a difference between workteam and working group. A summary of these differences is presented in the table no. 1 [3].

**Table no 1.** Work team/ Working Group

Work team	Working Group
Specifies specific objectives, which give identity, becoming an encouraging source	Adopts the organization's goal as the target of the group
Individual and collective activities lead to a common outcome	The result is the sum and coordination of each individual activity

The team encourages members to take on diverse and multiple roles	Assigns roles to members according to professional qualifications
Team members have separate or shared responsibility for the final result	Group members assume strictly individual responsibility for the particular results produced
The leadership and responsibilities functions are shared and distributed among members	A formal leader is designated
The team recognizes, rewards and celebrates collective successes	The group rewards and recognizes individual contributions

The team has certain qualities which differentiate it from a simple group of individuals. There are six specific criteria for distinguishing the teamwork [5]:

- the key element to be considered is placed at the level of the existing interdependence between members in order to achieve their team goals. In other words, the nature of teamwork implies that individuals interact and collaborate with one another;
- secondly, the team operates in a larger organizational environment with rights and obligations;
- thirdly, this group of individuals must be perceived as a team in the organization;
- fourthly, a collective mandate is necessary and it is generally based on the production of a good or a service;
- fifthly, the team gives its members a relative margin in terms of responsibility management;
- finally, the teamwork has a limited size depending on the system in which it operates.

The teamwork can take many forms and aim different objectives within an organizational system. Whether based on its level of interdependence or the degree of autonomy given to its members, the teamwork is proved to be distinctive from other types of small groups. Rousseau, Savoie and Battistelli have labeled the teamwork as "a formal group composed of at least two individuals together responsible for the performance of one or more tasks defined by the organization".

The composition and leadership of a project team are essential factors for successfully completing a project. These are part of the tasks of a project manager.

Each team questions in terms of balance, which does not refer to being made up of well-balanced people, but to the balance between its

components and between their personality profiles. In other words, a team has to co-opt people who can contribute with different qualities and traits to achieving the proposed goals, without duplicating those already existing. All this because some weaknesses of the members can be limited and their qualities used to the maximum for the efficiency. From this point of view, each member can fulfill a certain role.

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The project team is defined as a group of people with different backgrounds, skills, abilities and knowledge, but who complement, work together and cooperate, have the same goals, support and supports each other, communicate within the team. Among the tasks of the members of the project, we mention:

- adopting a working style aimed at solving the tasks;
- openly discussing opinions before making decisions;
- cooperating with non-project staff;
- remaining united in any situation.

Chiocchio and Essiembre [6] have defined the project team as a predetermined life duration team whose members are multifunctional and realize a specialized task.

A project team is made up of members with different personalities, knowledge, qualifications and qualities. The role of a project manager is to evaluate the project before choosing the staff and to build a team that benefits from the qualities of each of its members. When training the team, it is necessary to know the activities to be done, the knowledge and skills necessary to carry out that activity, the risks that may arise, and the persons

who are likely to be involved in the project. Often, selecting team members begin with informal discussions on possible availability and willingness to be involved in the project. It also turned out that the core of the project team should contain only 2 to 4 people to better coordinate all team members.

Constrained by, cost and quality, the very nature of the project team's work underpins a collective task much more complex than that assumed by other types of work teams [1]. Each member usually has a series of unique skills related to a particular field of expertise, the connection of the knowledge of all members being required.

The organization of managerial activity into network projects extends now to different sectors of the knowledge economy [7]. A project can be defined as a process [6]: requiring progressive development, which consumes material, human and financial resources, composed of interrelated activities, aiming to create a single output, temporary, complex and requiring a rich array of knowledge, skills and abilities.

Unlike the majority of work teams, the project teams have a predetermined lifespan and usually dissolve at the end of the mandate. Within this type of team, members often have a lower level of familiarity and proximity [8]. Each member is an expert in his / her particular sphere of influence and exercises his / her authority over the decisions relating to his / her expertise.

Consequently, the project team is much more autonomous in choosing its priorities and choices of interventions [8]. It is still important to note that the level of autonomy may vary depending on the type of project and the organization in which the team operates. The necessary conditions for the formation of an efficient team project refer to 4 basic elements:

- sense of purpose: common vision of the purpose and objectives pursued
- choosing the right people for the tasks to be done
- the necessary resources: technology, clear working methods, effective meetings, documentation, time management, conflict management
- Own characteristics: good communication, flexibility, motivation.

The stages a project team goes through to become an efficient one are: training, confrontation – conflicts may arise due to different views on the purpose or work methods that were chosen, normalization – members begin to gain a common vision, achievement - the team starts to become effective, transformation – the team can redefine its common goal, communication between team members is enormous, and each member responsibilities are understood and accepted.

### 3. The effectiveness of the project team

The quality of the group experience is the degree to which the team social climate is positive [5]. The quality of the group experience concerns the reaction of the members to the idea of working together [9]. This dimension corresponds to the presence and maintenance of positive interactions within a team. The effectiveness criteria includes several indicators, such as group quality life and member satisfaction towards the team [10].

The team sustainability is the ability and willingness of its members to continue working together [11]. This concept includes two main components: the team's adaptive capacity and the intention of the members to remain in the team [10]. The first component is the ability of the team to adapt to internal (e.g. new member integration) and external changes (e.g. introduction of new technology) [9]. The second component refers to the willingness of members to continue working together within the team [10]. Project management literature seems to have given prominence to success stories of this type of organization, a large number of project teams experience significant operational and effectiveness problems.

Project team performance is defined as the degree to which the team's products and services meet the standards and expectations of the constituents who receive them [10]. Considering the number of projects that lead to significant cost overruns and fail to meet their initial timelines [8], the project team's success is certainly not assured. On the contrary, taking into account the characteristics presented above, it seems to be particularly confronted with the challenges of teamwork and the problems of efficiency that can result from it.

Every manager dreams of having an efficient team. But what exactly is an efficient project team? A successful team could be described as a group of individuals working together towards a common goal and producing high-quality, effective results. Several studies have identified common characteristics of successful teams:

- 1- Clear Objective - every successful team has a clearly defined common objective. The goal is understood by all members of the team and everyone knows his or her exact responsibility in achieving this goal.
- 2- Effective communication - the team members are comfortable sharing their opinions and feelings without fear of being judged. They freely express their creative ideas and dare to ask questions before errors are made. Differences between individuals are valued and in the case of conflict, respect and dignity are always maintained. Criticism is always constructive

and aims to help solve a problem. The members of the performing team trust, help and respect each other.

3- Mutual trust - the members of a successful team have total confidence in each other. They have confidence in the ability of the other members to do their job as well as they can and on time. They do not need to "monitor" each other. Team spirit is important and optimism still dominates.

4- Sense of belonging - It is strengthened by involving members in making important decisions, selecting strategies for implementing the project and defining objectives.

5- Expressed recognition - The work of the successful team is recognized and appreciated by the managers and by the team members themselves. Individual performance is also recognized at fair value. And every goal achieved is celebrated. Recognition is a strong motivator for the high-performance team.

6- Maximum Productivity - The high-performance team is committed to producing meaningful results in accordance with high-quality standards. Members have a certain pride in meeting deadlines, achieving their goals and completing the work. They are constantly looking to improve.

7- Optimal flexibility - The efficient team can adapt to changing conditions and demands. The roles of each member of the team can vary and interchange. The strengths of each are identified and used appropriately.

8- Common values – an efficient team shares common values. These values include excellence, trust, team spirit, quality, respect, responsibility, and listening and customer satisfaction.

In summary, a successful project team has a clearly defined goal and values, effective working methods, a spirit of excellence and mutual respect, and a strong involvement of members in the success of the project.

Research results from CHAOS Report [12] of the Standish Group Corporation, specialized in research and project performance evaluation, reveals that the majority of projects do not meet their initial performance targets. Using a sample of 300 US companies from different economic sectors, the research shows that barely 30% of the projects are considered successful. At the same time, 44% of the projects showed delays, budget overruns, and 24% of the projects have failed or canceled.

## 4. Leadership

More specifically, the literature on project management suggests that this leadership should be focused on three axes [13]. The project manager must have a technical leadership in understanding the different technologies existing within the project [13]. Without this initial technical skill, it will be

difficult for him to assure his legitimacy and engage the team members in achieving common objectives. Also, the project manager must possess the interpersonal skills necessary to develop loyalty, commitment, respect, effort and trust within the team [13]. He must be able to know how to manage the conflicts and expectations of the different stakeholders of the project [7].

Many executives are disappointed with the functioning of their management team. Why isn't everyone concerned only with their own area of responsibility? Why are too many important decisions made behind the scenes without the opportunity for real debate?

- Management teams operate according to the principles of heroic leadership. In most management teams, only the leader is responsible for the overall results, following the example of traditional "heroes". His subordinates, even if they occasionally participate in decisions, are only responsible for their respective areas.
- Heroic leadership is counterproductive. Indeed, it fuels a vicious circle whereby the leader has no choice other than interventionism to ensure coordination, facing subordinates who feel all more disempowered on the issues of the whole company.
- Management teams need to evolve into truly shared leadership. With this new mode of operation, the entire management assumed the co-responsibility of the overall results. This is based on 3 pillars:
  - The establishment of shared responsibility logic;
  - A common vision of the objectives and direction to follow;
  - A strong mutual influence between the members of the team.

Management is almost naturally coupled that of charisma, also difficult to define. By its Greek etymology, it means gift of the gods and in our more modern understanding, it refers to someone who possesses uncommon skills and also exhibits certain rare qualities of charm, magnetism, calm and trust that allow persuading, attracting other people attention, raising their interest and stirring up their motivation to follow. A leader without charisma is like a meal without seasoning, it does not seduce much. Yet, we commonly use the term leader to designate a manager or an officer, even if we must not confuse the chief position with the leader capacity. Function, authority, and power do not necessarily confer the leadership talent and charisma that is the backbone, especially among those appointed to authority positions because of their « pedigree » or their social network, rather than their skills.

The leadership of the project manager must also be based on a more classical managerial dimension [13]. In sum, it must be able to think and act strategically in order to succeed in the complexity and ambiguity associated with a majority of projects [7]. He is responsible for clarifying the mission

of the team while effectively establishing the roles and responsibilities of the individual members [14]. Finally, other more general elements related to planning, organization, management and project control are also important [7]. In summary, the project manager leadership emerge as a key determinant for the effectiveness of the project team [15, 16, 17] and, more generally, as a crucial factor in the overall project success [14, 8].

However, the study of Turner and Muller [18] shows that the leadership style and the project manager skills have only a minor impact on the overall effectiveness of this type of team. To this end, Pearce and Manz bring forward that in our general review of leadership, one of the reasons some researchers concluded that leadership is not a major determinant, lies in the theoretical persistence on the role of the individual at the expense of the group.

Indeed, the organizational activity in project networks requires a reflection on the most effective type of leadership in this kind of structure, where expertise and transversality reign. The versatile and changing nature of the project highlights the fact that there is no single competency and leadership style to effectively manage all types of projects [19]. However, similar to teamwork, research on leadership in project teams focused on the role and influence of the project manager to the detriment of leadership from other members of the team. [19]

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

The study of the effectiveness of project teams has become an important research topic over the past decade [19]. However, performance (time, cost and quality) is usually the only dimension taken into account in project team documentation.

The main determinant of the effective project team emerging from the literature lies in the quality of the leadership of the project manager [14, 8]. Indeed, in the research regarding the leadership of project teams, a strong emphasis has been placed on analyzing the role of the manager.

In our opinion, when creating an efficient project team, it should be taken into account:

- Recruiting people with experience in project management;
- Encouraging learning for those less experienced in project management from those with more experience;
- Providing information to team members in order for them to be familiar with the situation and the likely objectives, resources, and risks;
- Assigning responsibilities and giving each member the possibility to define their own working methods to achieve their goals;

- Solving problems as they occur;
- Identifying ways to popularize individual merits;
- Fostering teamwork to lead to the creation of a common vision.
- Emotional non-involvement in decision-making;
- Clear definition of the risks to be avoided.

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