

GROUPS AND TEAMS FROM A MANAGERIAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

Groups and teams represent a common way for organizing the work in any organization. In order to benefit from their advantages, managers should know the particularities of different types of groups and teams which are or can be used in organizations. Thus, in the present paper we first present the main forms of authority in organization, respectively the organizational relationship, due to the fact that they will mainly influence the effectiveness of work groups and work teams. Then, we emphasize the characteristics of different types of groups and teams in organizational context, the reasons for their use and the management issues that can occur.

Key words: management, authority, group, team, organizational relationships

JEL Classification: D23, J59, L29, M1, M54

I. INTRODUCTION

The management of groups and teams in organization represents an important theme for any organization. But before setting up the groups and teams, managers need to bear in mind very clearly the purpose for organizing people into groups and teams whereas the quality of their work will depend on knowing the common objectives and, especially, on how people forming groups and their activities are hierarchized. This means that each member must know in what relationships he or she is with different people from the organization, whether they are or not managers. In management literature these relations are called organizational relationships, and the efficient functioning of groups and teams depend largely on them.

Regardless of the approaching manner of work team issue as particular type of group, most authors agree that all work teams are groups, but not all groups are work teams. Work team is a particular type of small group, along with committees, task forces, departments and councils (Zoltan & Vancea, 2015). Sociologists and psychologists address work teams from a broader perspective, often beyond organizational boundaries and often by referring to the variable of interest regarding wider phenomena observed in society; on the other hand, management literature treats them from a pragmatic perspective, the analysis being delimited to organizational context, respectively aspects regarding individuals and their relationships within organizational context (Zoltan & Vancea, 2015). Therefore, from a managerial point of view, it is necessary the differentiation between various types of groups and teams because their purposes are different. In addition, within groups and teams there is variation in the process of decision making, in the level of collaboration and communication, in the way the activities are managed by members themselves or by managers. And all these depends on how the authority in organizations is or not shared with teams and groups members, in other words, how many management interventions are needed to maintain the effectiveness of groups and teams in organizational context.

II. GROUPS AND TEAMS IN THE CONTEXT OF ORGANIZATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

In addressing the relationships that influence construction and functioning of organizational teams and groups, we must consider, first, the organizational context within which are established organizational relationships. The typology based on the nature of these relationships and the manifestation of competencies and responsibilities refers mainly to hierarchical relations and authority relations.

Hierarchical relations refer to the position of persons within the chain of command in the organizational chart. The lower the level at which is the position of a person in the organization chart, the less authority this person has.

The control unit is a management principle which indicates that a person has only one chief, otherwise, the result is confusion and contradictions – a sure “recipe” for inefficiency and ineffectiveness within an organization (Certo, 2002, p.300). However, Henri Fayol indicated that strictly acceptance of chain of command is not always desirable, but is helpful in some situations the use of a “bridge” or a “corridor”. This is a communication channel between the two divisions of the organization that is not depicted by communication

lines in the organization chart. Although the use of Fayol's bridge allows quickly obtaining of information, their ignorance of the people "stepped over" in the chain of command may prove more costly to the organization than strict compliance with the rules imposed by the chain of command. Thus, there must be informed all stakeholders in the organization about the information received through this "corridor".

Chester Barnard defines authority as the communication feature through which an order is accepted by a person in order to guide the activities he undertake within the system (organization or group or team), and the exercise of it is influenced less by formal organization than by acceptance coming from those who are under that authority (Barnard, 1938 as cited in Vlăsceanu, 2003, p.82).

In the organization may be exercised three main types of authority:

- hierarchical authority;
- general staff authority;
- functional authority.

Each type of authority exists only to allow people to carry out the types of responsibility with which they were charged.

Hierarchical authority, the most important authority in an organization, reflects the relationships between superiors and subordinates, consisting of the right to make decisions and give orders regarding to subordinates behavior related to the activities they have to fulfill. In teams hierarchical authority is represented by the leader appointed by top management or in some cases, by the leader chosen by team members.

General staff authority consists of the right to counsel or support those who have hierarchical authority to fulfill their own tasks. In general, the larger the organization, the greater the need and the capacity to employ people with general staff authority because, as an organization expands, it usually needs employees who have expertise in various fields (Vancea, 2008, p.62).

Employees with general staff authority fulfill three main roles, namely (Stieglitz, 1973 as cited in Certo, 2002, pp.318-319):

a. *Role of counseling* – the employees with general staff authority are internal consultants whose relations with the employees with hierarchical authority are similar to the relationship between a professional and a client. For example, the manager responsible with quality can advise the production manager in relation to technical modifications of the production process that will improve the quality of products.

b. *Role of serving* – this role can be better understood if employees with general staff authority are perceived as suppliers and those with hierarchical authority as customers. For example, the members of human resources department will recruit, hire and train employees for all departments of the organization; in essence, they are providers of employees, and diverse departments that need employees, are their customers.

c. *Role of control* – in this role, employees with general staff authority help to establish a mechanism for assessing the efficacy of the organization plans so as they are representatives or agents of top management.

There are also other roles which employees with general staff authority fulfill, but they must be concretely established in order to correspond perfectly to organization's needs. Although most managers recognize that much of the conflicts within the organization appear around the relations between people with hierarchical authority and those with general staff authority (French, 1987, p.666), the latter ones have a well defined role in the ad-hoc committees and permanent committees. In the case of teams, these roles may be performed by all members depending on the nature of the task they have to accomplish, the amount of information they need, the degree of autonomy granted by top management, but mostly depending on the power they have in the organization (especially the expert power of team members).

Functional authority consists of the right to give orders within a segment of management system in which this right does not normally exist. Usually, it is assigned to people who already have hierarchical or general staff authority, covering generally only areas of specific tasks and being operational only for certain periods of time. These people must be able to exercise some control over the organization's members from other areas in order to fulfill their responsibilities in their field of activity. For example, one of the basic obligations of a vice-president responsible for finance includes monitoring the financial position of the entire management system. Therefore, is usually delegated to him or her functional authority to request information from the various departments of the organization, giving orders where normally he or she can not give (Certo, 2002, p.321).

People with functional authority, by the hierarchical position they hold – this means important responsibilities and a significant amount of activities to be coordinated and controlled – have in their subordination individuals who can form a team at least for specific tasks and for a certain period of time as long as they: will motivate such a method of work; will establish clear, measurable and achievable objectives; will emphasize the importance of achieving these goals for overall activity of organization; will take into account the other activities that subordinates have to fulfill according to their current position.

Although authority can exist within an organization in various forms, these forms must be used in a combination which will allow the best way for teams, groups and their members to fulfill the assigned responsibilities, whether individual or collective, and therefore, to help management system to adequately validate their objectives.

III. TYPES OF ORGANIZATION GROUPS

The oldest and most widespread classification of work groups states the differentiation by the degree of formalization and relations structuring between members. It distinguishes in this regard the *formal groups*, governed by rules, laws, rules and regulations officially established and the *informal groups*, generated by psychological, inter-subjective relations that appear among members (Zlate, 2008, p.402). The first type of group is made by an authority, while the second type of group arises over time as a result of socio-affective preferences which its members experience in relations with one another. In other words, within organizational environment, a person joins to a group either following his or her own will, or is placed in a given group whose purpose is well established by the organization (Curşeu, 2007, p.28).

From a managerial perspective, we are particularly interested in kinds of formal groups which are established and operate in organizations because formal group is a group that exists within an organization, by virtue of manager desire, for performing the tasks that lead to achievement of organization objectives. The arrangement of members in areas such as marketing, human resources and production departments are examples of formal groups, and they are clearly defined and structured.

Management literature usually classifies formal groups in task forces and operation groups, committees and working teams.

Operation group is a formal group present in the organizational chain of command, with the task of routine activities of the organization (Harrington & Harrington, 2001, p.215).

Task force is a formal group including members from the organization that interact with each other to carry out non-routine activities. The members of this group can originate (and often originate in fact) from different levels and segments of the organization. As a rule, the task force has the charge of dealing with a very important or urgent problem. Usually, task forces are formed when a production process is interrupted for a period of time due to problems or issues regarding the operating safety (Harrington & Harrington, 2001, p.215).

Committee is a group of persons responsible for carrying out certain specific activities and is considered usually a task force. Generally, committees are destined to make some decisions, make recommendations, to conduct an investigation or to solve a problem from the management point of view. There are four main reasons for their creation: to allow members of the organization to exchange ideas, to give rise to suggestions and recommendations, to develop new ideas for solving problems in the organization, to support the designing of organizational policies.

Committees can be (Manolescu, 2001, p.194):

- *ad-hoc committees* – are designed for relatively narrow and short term purposes, and may be particularly important for the organization;

- *permanent committees* – are stable and long-term established (for example, budget committees);

- *councils* – can be found particularly in public organizations where their members can be elected.

Overall, the committees have a number of roles in the organization, especially in the decision-making process, such as: can improve the quality of decision making; encourage the expression of some honest opinions; tend to increase the participation of organization members in the decision making process; ensure representation of significant groups in decision making process.

Several procedural steps can be taken to enhance the likelihood of a committee success, such as (Certo, 2002, p.502): committee goals should be clearly defined; committee authority must be specified; committee optimal size should be determined; a leader should be chosen based on the ability to efficiently drive a meeting, etc.

Along with the procedural steps, top management must support the committee and avoid the phenomenon of “group think”, respectively the situation in which the desire of agreement so strongly dominates the group that it overshadows the need to realistically assess the alternative solutions to the problem and all members adopt the same mindset.

Working teams are operative groups used in organizations to achieve greater organizational flexibility or to cope with rapid growth. They evolved from teams oriented on solving problems – which were inspired by Japanese quality circles – consisting of 5 to 12 volunteer members belonging to various areas within department and meet weekly to discuss ways of improving quality and efficiency (Certo, 2002, p.502). Generally, upper management seldom interferes to direct these teams; however, it was found that the higher management manifests more interest in their activities, the more likely working team will be successful (Harrington & Harrington, 2001, p.214).

IV. CATEGORIES OF ORGANIZATIONAL TEAMS

A team is a group whose members influence each other in order to fulfill some organizational objective(s).

The issue of teams classifications into different kind remain directly connected to how they are constituted in the internal structure of a company, the role / functions assigned to them, the proposed objectives etc. Therefore, of particular interest is not so much the names / syntagms found in the literature on teams, but the mechanism by which it is targeted to build such structures in order to improve the overall efficiency of the business organization (Burciu, 2008, p.357).

There are many forms that teams takes in organizations, such as (West, 2005, p.34):

- counseling and involvement teams, for example, the committees for managerial decision-making, quality control circles (CC), employee involvement groups;
- services and production team, for example, assembling teams; maintenance, construction, mining and air transport teams; departmental teams; sales teams etc.;
- design and development teams, for example, research teams, new products execution teams, software teams;
- intervention and negotiation teams, for example, military units, operators teams and union negotiating teams.

These various types of teams differ in several key features:

- the degree of permanence – design teams have a long life which can vary from weeks to years, while others teams meet for a few hours;
- the emphasis on ability / competence development – medical teams must reach a high level of performance over time, while in general, decision-making committees does not pay attention to skills development;
- the true autonomy and influence – assembling teams can have a low autonomy and influence, while the main management teams are very powerful (Flood, MacCurtain & West, 2001, p.143);
- the level of task from routine to strategy – air transport over short distances involves routine tasks, while the government team can establish a strategy throughout 10 years.

The most common organizational teams, taking into account also the criteria outlined above, are: *problem-solving team*, *self-managed team* and *inter-functional team*.

Problem-solving team – is a team from the organization set up to help eliminate a specific problem within the organization. It is composed of between 5 and 12 members and it is created to analyze modalities to improve quality at all stages in organization, to make more efficient the organizational processes or to improve the overall working environment (Sconk, 1992, p.68). As a result, after the team reaches a consensus, make recommendations to the manager and the problem is solved, it is generally disjointed.

Self-managed team – is a team that is planning, organizing, influencing and controlling its activity in conditions of minimum guidelines and interference from upper management. It includes a highly integrated group of qualified people, who have inter-functional training and have the responsibility and authority to carry out a range of specific activities (Franz, 2004). Basically, working team with proper management conducts itself, is responsible for setting its own budget, for administration of its own resources, for hiring or firing its own personnel (Harrington & Harrington, 2001, pp.214-215).

Requiring minimal attention, self-managed teams provides top management the opportunity to undertake other important management activities such as strategic planning. This does not mean that they carry out their activities without the need of feedback from upper management with regard to compliance with the organization's objectives forasmuch as their evaluation criteria will be established according to standards set at the organization level.

Inter-functional team – is a team from organization made up of people from various functional areas of the organization that focuses on a specific target. Inter-functional teams may or may not lead themselves, although usually self-managed teams are inter-functional teams. They may be, for example, teams formed to improve marketing effectiveness within the organization or teams set up to control production costs.

Since this kind of team operates in the same department, does not require major changes in the operational program of its members and does not raise special problems related to adaptation and leadership compared with other two types (Zoltan, 2012).

A particular case in classification of organizational teams is the management teams. In this way, there are extremely various names and classifications of management teams and / or groups that make up these teams, respectively task force concept, the department of organizational chart, reflection group, thinking group, departmental team etc. (Cooper ed., 2005, p.82). Seeking to suggest how it should work an efficient management team and to identify "models" of performing unitary teams, theory of team management recommends two known types of teams (which, at first glance, have no connection with performing management), namely orchestra and

sports team; in addition, according to Drucker, “performing teams of the future will be organized on the model of a football team” (Maciariello, 2005, p.90). Thus, beyond the different names and classifications on the team what remain essential are the cohesion, team spirit and trust between the team members as well as the coordination manner toward a common goal.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Each of the criteria presented in this paper in order to delineate diverse organizational groups and teams will influence the construction of organizational groups and teams and will have an impact on how they will develop. Of course, various combinations of these criteria will generate other types encountered under various names. But beyond this, are important for the organization the purpose for which groups and teams are formed and the organizational relationships under the auspices of which groups and teams have to accomplish their goals and objectives.

Today most of the medium and large organizations are driven by management teams. Moving of power from individual to team is due, to some extent, to the current climate which requires from organizations flexibility, creativity and adaptability to changing conditions that characterize the economic and social environment in which they running their activities. On the other hand, the higher is the level of education of individuals at the age of legal employment, the higher is their desire to have a word to say in terms of management and to be part of a management team.

In this context, in terms of management of various types of teams presented in this paper, Harrington & Harrington talks about teams led by other teams. According to Harrington & Harrington (2001, p.205), the latter are called improvement executive teams and their responsibility is the rigorous organization of teams involved in the improvement of company performance. Certainly, the degree of involvement, authority and control of management teams in the activities of work teams will vary significantly for inter-functional teams, problem-solving teams and self-managed teams.

Finally, regardless of the manner in which activities are clustered or goals are established in organizations, managers need to work with groups and / or teams of employees who usually have widely different personalities, abilities and skills. This requires from upper management to exert authority differently from one group to another group and from one team to another team whereas on a thorough understanding of nature and importance of organizational relationships depends not only the adequate functioning and development of both groups and teams, but also the effectiveness of organizations within which these groups and teams operate.

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