Team Analysis

Master Science Teacher Scoring Team

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Team Formation

The team was formed for the purpose of conducting scoring for the Master Science Teachers accreditation examination. The team was hand-selected through a testing facilitation company based upon a combination of word-of-mouth references, review of expertise in the field, and review of personal resume’. Initially, the intent was for the team to work four to six weeks, one day per week, until all tests were completed. It took the team four weeks to complete the project.

The team was comprised of a demographically diverse team that was also organizationally diverse. Demographically, team members were male and female, African-American, white, and Hispanic, and ranged in age from thirty to sixty. Organizationally, the team experience ranged from K-college with diverse backgrounds that included classroom teaching, specialist, principal, and instructional coach, representing a diverse cross-section of education.

When comprising the team, the testing facilitation company generally followed a traditional approach for team organization. In this approach, “managers or technical experts analyze a task and divide it into small units that are performed by individuals” (Levi, 2011 p. 8).

However, rather than assigning tasks to individuals, the testing facilitation company utilized this traditional organizational structure to assign tasks to teams. In addition to the Master Science Teacher (MST) scoring team, three other academic content areas were represented (language arts, math, and social studies). Each of these academic areas had one or more small teams working on similar assignments. In addition to being a part of the traditional approach for team organization, all of these teams, including the MST scoring team, were part of the traditional team power hierarchy. Meaning, that there was some limited autonomy from the organization itself when the teams met in small groups, however, rather than being fully regulating, team leaders were chosen by the organization to facilitate the work (Levi, p. 7). The organizational design for the MST team, and the task at hand was intentionally highly-structured and aimed at task performance.

Additionally, as the team was established as a “work group” of sorts to complete a task, a structured “mission statement” was not formed. However, it was clear to the team that the intended goal was to complete scoring of the essays submitted during the examination. During the initial phases of the group, an unspoken mission between the members also seemed to unfold, one that targeted an even higher value to the standards of integrity and fidelity to which the examinations were being assessed.

Finally, the organization again gave a nod to the tone of traditional organizational hierarchy with teams established for a targeted goal by facilitating an initial step into the communication of each group. Before beginning the task at hand, all of the teams were treated to a breakfast during which participants were assigned seating with the team they were working with. This initial social context allowed for small group communication to begin with establishing rapport and aiming at reducing the complexity challenges faced by new teams as noted in Beebe and Masterson’s chapter on Small Group Communication Theory. “Getting to know someone is a process of progressively reducing uncertainty- and a lot of uncertainty exists especially at the outset of working with others in groups and teams (Beebe and Masterson, 2009 p. 38).

Team Leadership

As noted previously, the leader of the team was appointed by the organization. And in following the tone of limited autonomy set by the organization the team leaders title was actually “team facilitator.” The team facilitator had several years of previous experience working as a facilitator for the organization, as well as several years of experience as a facilitator working in her own position outside of the organization. In order to get the team started, she took on a more authoritative style and applying situational leadership to the context due to the nature of the task (presenting guidelines and instructions) and to the newness of the team members of which only one has previously scored the examinations. As the team began their work, they were nearly all at a low level of group readiness due to inexperience. As the team continued their work over the next few hours and weeks, their readiness level increased, and conversely, the team leader’s style moved toward coaching (high task, high relationship). However, the group did not ever move to the far end of the spectrum, with the leader becoming a delegator (Hersey and Blanchard, 1988; 2011 p. 173). Although the team’s readiness level was quite a bit higher after the inception and initial introduction of the project, the task-oriented goal focus, and the small size of the group were not conducive to movement toward a delegation style of leadership. Furthermore the time construct under which the team was working provided additional challenges for team development.

In the context of this situation, the leadership style was highly effective in that the team moved through the work toward the goal with little disruption and well in advance of the targeted timeline. The team leader employed many of the skills and fundamental behaviors of a team facilitator including “leading by example” (Zenger, Musselwhite, Hurson, & Perrin, 1994 p. 48), focusing on defining and accomplishing the task, knowing that a decision must be made rapidly at times, fostering self-discovery, and taking responsibility for an atmosphere conducive to the work of the team (Kayser, 1990 p.17).

Team Communication

As mentioned previously, the team leader focused the team on their task, and the organization established a social context prior to the beginning of the work for the team to establish a rapport. Both of these contexts allowed the group to have both a “social-emotional cohesiveness” and an “instrumental or task cohesiveness” (Barker, Walhers, & Watson, 2001 p. 58). During the actual work time, the team took on a communication pattern similar to the decentralized “open” style of communication network with an overlapping layer of centralized “wheel” communication (2011 p. 98-99). Information was passed between all team members at all times, and the opportunity for team members to communicate with one another was open. However, when team members were providing their feedback, the discussion almost entirely went “through” the team leader.

Perhaps this overlapping of communication styles can be attributed to the overall communication dynamic of the team. During the time spent working, the team dynamic was almost entirely focused on the task at hand, with little attention to social communication other than a very short discussion or joke. The team appeared to just past a level of “social politeness” with one another.

This communication style of task-oriented behavior and just past “social politeness” contributed to the predominate lack of dysfunction in the team itself. The team was, for the most part, not dysfunctional simply because the context of dysfunction was only marginally allowed to exist. Dysfunction did occur on a slight scale, as the team worked, there were very brief discussions during which one team member dissented from the team opinion. When questions were posed about some of the criteria for making decisions about examinations, the team leader gently redirected these discussions and refocused on the task at hand. Under the construct of focusing on task to get accomplish a goal the team appeared to have few incidences of dysfunction. Yet, the inability to broach a particular subject is in and of itself dysfunctional. This situation over a longer period of time may have contributed to greater conflict in the team, as it was apparent that the dissenting team member was satisfied with the redirection and refocusing approach. Given the construct of the work itself, being an invitation to work for this particular organization with a “seasoned” team leader, this lack of continued conflict may have also been silenced due to a wish to continue working with the team.

Team Phases

The MST team at first glance appeared to be stalled out in the “forming” stage of team development. Looking more deeply, it can be noted that the team did move through nearly all of the phases of development with the exception of “storming” stage. Essentially, the team simply “left out” one of the most vital stages of team formation. This may have led to an even deeper level of dysfunction than if the team had actually entertained the question or thoughts of the dissenting team member. According to Daniel Levi,

“Although this conflict (during the storming phase) might appear to be unpleasant, it is

important that it take place because it promotes the sharing of different perspectives.

Resolution of this conflict clarifies the groups goals and often leads to increased group

cohesion” (2011 p. 40).

By avoiding conflict, the MST team set themselves up for future challenges as a team by establishing a misconception that “conflict should be avoided at all costs” (2009 p. 152). Rather, “ conflict is a natural byproduct of communication” (p. 152). Further, the question of whether or not a team would ever be truly successful leaving out one or more of the aforementioned phases.

As the team members moved through the majority of stages of team development, each stage took on its own characteristics. Initially, the team began with a very defined “forming stage.” During this time, the members of the MST team were provided an orientation by the team leader, and got to know one another. The team then moved immediately to the “norming” stage. Norms, rules, and set up and agreed upon, with focus on the task at hand, with no challenges to be noted. The team then eased into the “performing” stage. The majority of the work time spent was actually spent the “performing” stage. Team members focused on the target at hand, and there was little discussion or “off task” behavior during this time. Additionally, the team became extremely focused and skilled at the task on hand. At one point, this intense focus on work caused some social behavior to be reduced almost to the point of non-existence, occurring only when someone in the group attempted to “guess” what other members of the team noted. The work group rounded out their assignment by adjourning. This phase, described as, “dissolution, completion of task, and end of group” (2011 p. 40) was due again to the construct of the work itself, however at the end of the assignment, all members shared personal information promising to meet again and/or connect with one another outside of the task.

Team Effectiveness

Through the amount of time on task, and focus of goals for the team, it could be said that this team was highly effective in these aspects. Using these broad generalizations and sweeping strokes however, we might miss a deeper level of understanding about the effectiveness of the team. By skipping an entire phase, “storming,’ in the cycle, the effectiveness of the team becomes more questionable. If the team continued to working together, eventually the “storming” stage of the team cycle would resurface and the team would need to take the time to address the conflicts contributing to the “storming”

Team Decision-making

At the beginning of the team meeting, the team was instructed about what to do for the remainder of the work time. Since this was done in a more top-down style of management, there was not input from the entire team during that time. When the work began, the team decision-making shifted to a consensus format of decision-making. As previously mentioned, conflict among the group was limited to discussion of pedagogy. Additionally, the other area of conflict was related to team alignment with scores given. Each team member would have an opportunity to read the essay provided by the MST scoring team, and then asked to make a decision about a score based upon the guidelines provided earlier in the day. When team members finished reading the essays, the team leader asked each member their score, and for justification about the score. When all scores were shared, if there was an outlier, the outlying team member was asked about their decision-making process. After other members listened to the “argument’ provided by the team outlying member they would then consider new information. If necessary, the group would then return to their original scores to check for possible revisions based upon new knowledge. Team members were then asked their “new score.” One-hundred percent of the time, the outlying scorer would align with the other scorers when reporting the new score.

“A team can support the decision 100% even though not all of the members completely agree with it. Consensus is voluntary giving of consent” (2011, p. 160). In this circumstance, the outlying team member was “giving consent” by re-visiting their original score.

Team Conflict

In previous notes, the amount of conflict encountered during the work completed by this team was marginal. This is attributed to several factors. One of the key factors was team motivation to complete the task at hand. One major motivating factor was reward. “The task may require coordinated effort, but team members may believe their evaluations and rewards are primarily based on individual performance” (2011, p. 60). The rewards for this team were not only in monetary compensation for their time, but in consideration for returning to work with the group.

The other major factor that assisted in management/limitation of team conflict included the team leader’s skill at curtailing conflict throughout the project. By clarifying existing positions, defining areas of agreement, and facilitating resolution in areas of difference at the start of and throughout the team project, the team leader employed the use of three successful conflict management strategies (Kayser, 1994 p. 147-162).

Team Goals

The team met their goals as established by the organization. However, there were marked opportunities for improvement. The construct established by the organization in addition to the overall tone of the team itself made movement toward the goal of scoring all of the tests efficient and effective. The task on hand was completed in a timely, appropriate, non-threatening way. This team in another setting may not be as efficient and/or as effective. For example, when working on a team that has a conflict, or if conflict arose with the current team in a future setting this particular team may lack the skill-set necessary to complete the task at hand. In order to move forward to being a fully functional team, additional time would need to be spent with the same team members working toward other goals. This team was the result of the need for a project to be completed and/or outsourced, and was therefore temporary in the time of work together and transient in the need to form a fully cohesive team.

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