The Levy Launch

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The Levy Launch is a center providing organizations with management and strategy consultation to improve organizational performance through systematic analysis of existing organizational problems and developing specific plans for improvement. Our consultants will initiate and guide change processes, design systems and structures to support and manage change and implement technology. We offer corporate training, coaching and corporate education. The center's corporate development workshops include team building, leadership training and increasing managerial effectiveness. In addition, we offer self-improvement workshops. Organizations investing and making a commitment to offer their employee's personal development workshops attract more qualified workers, improve morale, enhance job satisfaction, develop competencies, and create inclusive work environments. In addition, corporations maximizing on opportunities to provide their employees with self-improvement workshops convey a sincere commitment to develop and empower their employees to achieve their fullest potential in relation to their personal and career pursuits.

You, Me and Them: An Awesome Us

Building Effective, High Performing Teams

Teamwork is an essential, core, developmental process that can dramatically and positive affect organizational performance. For a team to be highly effective, its members must demonstrate social and positive interdependence, share information, support each other to make work more efficient and in the process, members create their own, unique roles. High functioning team members nurture and support one another, develop trust and interdependence which is crucial for optimal performance. The development of credibility through consistent follow through, integrity in work, consensus building creates solidarity. Team members will experience disagreement and conflict which can be maximized to generate creative breakthroughs and new discoveries. Innovation can be achieved through creative problem solving. The attainment of the above ideals energizes team members, creates reciprocity and contributes to the healthy functioning of the team.

I. Fundamental Elements of a Team

A. Responsibility

A team is defined by members having a mutual responsibility for executing work processes to achieve a goal. Each member assumes a role and if he/she doesn't function as expected in the role, it affects the performance of others and can undermine the quality of the service being delivered. In the end, it interferes with the overall functioning and success of the team.

B. Mutual Accountability

Mutual accountability means understanding and appreciating that each member of the team assumes responsibility for the team's success. If problems emerge, we do not look at each individual's effort, but at the interactions and relationships that define their processes for completing work.

If a breakdown is identified, it can usually be addressed by examining the process and making improvements in the way it operates.

For example, if a road crew is repairing pot holes and there is an equipment problem, the supervisor should not look for who to blame for the equipment not working. Instead, the supervisor should focus on the what and how of their process.

1. The what consists of examining what weakness in current processes led them to not properly maintain their equipment.
2. The how refers to asking if they can change their work processes to minimize this from occurring again in the future.

C. Team Purpose

Teams do not typically exist at work because it's nice to have them around or because we all like each other's company. Implementing formally recognized teams makes sense because they facilitate the interaction necessary to deliver services and products.

II. Conceptualizing Work as a Process

A. Work is a Process

If you were to study how work is completed in any organization, you will learn that it occurs as a process.

All of the individuals involved in executing work processes depend on each other for its successful completion and to give meaning to their work. A mistake anywhere in the process affects everyone in one way or another.

B. Why Things Go Wrong in Processes

In the majority of the time, things go wrong because of a breakdown in the process somewhere. In terms of work in organizations, breakdowns occur when individuals do not cooperate in executing various steps in a process they are a part of. Remember, individuals who do not actively cooperate with one another on work that requires cooperation will experience problems.

C. Why Individuals Do Not Cooperate Better

There are numerous reasons why individuals do not cooperate at work. These reasons include:

    a. Individuals are not aware that work is a process. In large organizations, managers and employees do not think that the quality of their individual work depends on the quality of the work of others.
    b. Management evaluates individuals not in terms of their ability to cooperate and work well with others, but on their individual performance.
    c. The point is that individuals are not paid to cooperate. Usually, little emphasis, misplaced on communicating and understanding how everyone's work is interdependent. The results are communication breakdowns, compromised quality and mistakes—and extra costs.

III. The Organization as a System

A. There are many definitions of a system, but for our purposes let us consider it as something we create to produce or deliver a service we value. The following shows systems and what services they deliver:

    1. An airline is a system for delivering fast, efficient transportation
    2. A restaurant is a system for creating and serving meals.
    3. A printing plant is a system for delivering magazines and books.
    4. A construction company is a system for constructing buildings.

B. Think about this:

    1. There is no organization that is not a system.
    2. There is no organization in which work does not get done in terms of processes.
    3. There is no organization in which the work of everyone is not interdependent in some way.
    4. To make your system work, you need teamwork.
    5. The organization needs to consciously foster a sense of working together to achieve individual, group and organizational objectives.

IV. The Importance of the Teamwork Attitude

A. What is Teamwork?

Teamwork is both an attitude and set of actions. The teamwork attitude reminds everyone that their work is interdependent, and that the success of the entire team requires that individuals work effectively with each other. Teamwork actions include:

    1. Understanding the whole process and goals
    2. Understanding their individual roles in the process
    3. Communicating openly and regularly with one another
    4. Having joint responsibility to execute and improve processes

V. Foundations of Teamwork Values

A. Goals for Organizations

An important goals for all organizations is ensuring that the service provided is high quality and that its needs and expectations of the consumer. So—since work is interdependent we need to implement the following actions that:

1. Facilitate individual working together
2. Minimize rework and wasted time on mistakes
3. Teamwork facilitates the efficient management of processes. The efficient management of processes suggests that you have to get individuals to really work well with each other.

B. Why you need values that support teamwork

Individuals behave in ways that are consistent with their values.

Values are what individuals believe to be right, good, true, correct, desirable and moral. Everyone has a set of morals and values that they learned through experience and socialization. Our personality traits can be considered values that are ingrained—enduring principles that govern our attitude and perspective of the world.

If you do not have values in place that support teamwork, your team will not perform well. It is like a sports team where everyone wants the spotlight. Members on such a team will not perform well and win.

C. The four teamwork values:

1. We're all in this together

   This is the foundation value for teams and teamwork. It emerges naturally from the idea of the organization as a system. If we're all in this together, then our individual success depends on our mutual success.

   If you really accept and believe we're all in this together—then when something goes wrong, your first inclination will not be to find the individual who is responsible for what went wrong. Similarly, when the team succeeds, you will all share in the reward.

2. Open, honest communication

   Remember—for teams to prosper, teammates need to be able to speak candidly with one another.

   One aspect of teamwork is empathy. Empathy means being able to see the world from the viewpoint of others. It means having the appreciation of problems of others—of their abilities, pressures and their behaviors. Without empathy, you close yourself off from others in ways that

   limit your ability to communicate and collaboration with them. With empathy, you open yourself up to hearing what others have to say. In doing so—you create an environment where they do the same for you.

   Listening is associated with empathy. Sometimes—it is difficult to listen. Others attempt to express what is on their minds and we may disagree. We want to correct their understanding because we have our own personal view of things and this view is a filter to interpret and judge what others have to say and do.

Listening effectively means adjusting the filter and simply hearing what others have to say. If you can do this, you create a situation where others do the same.

Naturally, empathy and listening are closely associated. They facilitate open and honest communication that makes high performing teams. If you are empathetic, you help create an environment that discourages game playing and deception in communication.

3. Everyone has open access to information

An element of effective decision making at any level of an organization is associated with the information an individual possesses. High performing companies recognize the importance of sharing information. These companies understand that limited information means that decisions will be based on speculation rather than facts. Such decisions will be more likely to bring actions that result in costly mistakes.

There will usually be an element of uncertainty in any decision. We cannot predict exactly what will occur when we do things. However, managers do not need to raise the probability of uncertainty by withholding information from employees who need it to effectively contribute to organization processes.

Sharing information facilitates cooperation. Employees cannot identify and cooperate with each other if they do not have access to the same information. Without a common identity among employees across organizations, they cannot cooperate effectively. Systems depend on cooperation for smooth functioning.

Think about this: "I didn't know" This is a common reason why employees make mistakes. Efficiency, effectiveness and good teamwork are all positively correlated with open access to information.

4. Focus on processes

There is a tendency for some managers to forget that work is a process—and they inadvertently focus on the behavior of employees in a vacuum, separate from the system and its processes as the key to success.

If employees some how feel separate from the processes they are a part of, those processes will not be as effective as they can. The goal is for employees to understand the following:

    a. That their work is important
    b. That others depend on them
    c. That they are contributing to delivering high quality services

Work in any organization can best be defined as executing processes.

VI. The Team Tempo

A. The following represents elements of an excellent team that possesses tempo:

1. A trust relationship among members of the team
2. An attitude that is flexible, durable, open and growing
3. Clear, properly developed goals, objectives and clear expectations
4. A focus on strengths of the organization and individuals
5. A readiness to take on new and different challenges, problems and opportunities

6. Caring—the desire to relate to people in respectful, dignified ways
7. Accountability—feeling truly answerable for one's actions as a leader and team member
8. Synergy—the capacity to combine resources for positive results
9. Communication—shared meaning and shared understanding

VII. Characteristics of Productive Work Teams

1. Team members are working toward common goals that everyone knows, understands and accepts. The goals not only serve the organization, but also give team members opportunities to develop.
2. Members know what their individual responsibilities and priorities are, and how they relate to other members. There is no duplication of effort.
3. Work atmosphere is informal, comfortable and fairly tension free.
4. Team morale is high. Members are enthusiastic about their work and eager to celebrate their accomplishments. This strengthens bonds between members.
5. Team productivity is high—and members are enthusiastic about their work.
6. Team leader takes pride in the team's work.
7. Leader shows interest in each team member's achievement and regularly provides feedback.
8. Members have confidence and trust in one another.
9. Members are cooperative rather than competitive. They are eager to help each other.
10. Members encourage one another to achieve high levels, but do so without setting unrealistic expectations.
11. Policies that govern team interaction are fair, consistently applied and subject to change. Leader consults members before making changes affecting the team.
12. A leader should not dominate the team.
13. Discussions about work should be conducted—and are pertinent to the tasks of the team.
14. Communication lines are open—and all members feel free to express their ideas no matter how unusual. Members need to know where others stand on issues.
15. Criticism is acceptable when it is delivered respectfully and constructively.
16. The team is comfortable with conflict. Members recognize disagreements and work fairly toward resolving them.
17. The decisions of the team come from a general agreement of the team.
18. Members usually know where the team is heading—and the team evaluates how well it is operating, openly discussing problems and finding solutions.
19. Members do not feel threatened by change—they are eager to try new, creative approaches

VIII. Procedures for Structuring and Nurturing a Team

A. Once a team has been formed the following elements should be instituted:

1. Present the team with its mission, structure positive interdependence among team members and engage in the process of redefining the mission into goals specific to the team.
2. Teams must operationalize their goals into measurable tasks
3. Teams need to have frequent and regular meetings that provide members opportunities to interact and promote each other's success.
4. Establishing clear rules of conduct for effective teams—so they can achieve their purpose and performance goals.
5. Ensure accountability by directly measuring the progress of the team in achieving its goals. A method needs to be created to measure team performance and contributions by each member. The team must also be accountable for achieving its goals and each team member must be accountable for contributing his/her share of the work.

6. Show progress by establishing a few challenging tasks the team can complete.
7. Provide training to enhance both task work and teamwork skills. As the team progresses in achieving goals, new skills will become relevant.
8. Have frequent team celebrations and seek opportunities to recognize member's contributions to team success.

IX. Focus of Teambuilding

A. Roles and relationships

1. The focus is on each team member's job requirements and how they relate to responsibilities of other members.

    a. What are the job functions and responsibilities of individual members?
    b. Do all members understand who is responsible for and who has authority over what?
    c. How do the different jobs relate to one another?
    d. What are the members major satisfactions and dissatisfactions with their jobs? What can be done about the dissatisfaction?
    e.   How is job performance evaluated? How do individuals know they are performing well.
    f.   Are they given specific, constructive feedback about ways to improve performance?

B. Individual competencies

1. The focus is on each member's strengths.
2. What knowledge areas and skills is each member strongest in?
3. How can members benefit from each other's areas of expertise

C. Operating processes

1. Focus is on team procedures for communicating, decision making, problem solving.
2. Has the team established guidelines for making decisions and resolving conflicts?
3. Does everyone on the team understand and follow guidelines?
4. What operating policies and procedures are working well?
5. What policies and procedures are inhibiting individual or team performance?
6. What policy and procedure changes can be made?

D. Interpersonal relationships

1. The focus here is on dynamics between team members—how well members work together.
2. Do members feel they are all on the same page?
3. Do they feel comfortable talking openly to one another?
4. Do they feel understood by one another?
5. Do members respect and like the team leader?
6. Can they speak openly to the leader without worrying about repercussions?
7. Do individual work habits or personal biases interfere with teamwork?
8. Be courteous, respectful and patient when interacting with colleagues
9. Verbalize the unique talents and contributions of colleagues
10. Suspend judgment until you hear all the pertinent facts
11. Share your resources with others so they can succeed too
12. Don't get defensive when others disagree with your views; learn from it

13. Try to empathize—appreciate others by inserting yourself in their situation
14. Be available to others who need your help
15. Trust that others will take responsibility for their own work
16. Support others in producing high quality work

Value Clarification Exercise

1. What do we stand for?
2. What work behaviors mirror these values?
3. How do we treat each other in the workplace?
4. What are the core work values that are important to us?
5. How do we want to treat each other at work?
6. How do we want to be perceived by others?