Principals' Sabbatical Report

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I would like to thank my Board of Trustees and the Ministry of Education very much for allowing me the opportunity to take leave from the school. I have found the sabbatical to be very beneficial professionally, culturally, spiritually as well as allowing 'real' time to study, read and reflect on my role as the leader of the school.

Purpose of Sabbatical

1. To attend the Pacific Institute For Educational Leadership Course in Fiji facilitated by Dr Eileen Piggott-Irvine and Dr Carol Cardno
2. To investigate how to effectively build and manage successful teams within schools and across schools.

Pacific Institute for Educational Leadership Course   Fiji 12-22 July

Fourteen primary and secondary Principals, from five different countries (New Zealand, Tonga, Fiji, Samoa and Vanuatu) spent ten days together working on leadership issues Main areas covered were;
- Leadership and Management
- Action Research and School Development – very useful as our school is carrying out action research in our Literacy contract
- Collecting and using Data for Informed Decision Making
- Understanding Organisations – for a week we prepared in groups a case study based on a Principal entering a new school and making some very poor choices around managing an organisation
- Educational Leadership
- Organisational Learning – appraisal, how to carry out hard conversations with staff, defensive behaviour, creating high trust etc
- Strategic Management
- Change Management
- Collaborative Management and Distributive Leadership
- Appraisal
- Avoiding Burnout/ Finding Balance
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All topics were supported by up to date research and professional readings were included to be read in our own time and discussed in class. Five books were also given to each participant as part of the course costs. We visited a High School, predominantly Fijian Indian pupils, in Nadi on our last day

I found the course to be a huge learning curve, especially in the area of updating myself with current research. I came away with a whole new appreciation of the New Zealand education system and the difficulties faced by our Pacific neighbours. Our discussions were rich and wide ranging, incorporating views from primary and secondary systems as well as systems across cultures.

On my way back from Fiji I stayed in Auckland to visit schools and work at UNITECH Library. I started a Masters paper on an Action Research project about developing effective teams.

Self Reflection   Sabbatical Position

I have found the action research model to be a very thorough and effective process in instigating change within a school based on evidence.

There are areas I now wish to review within the school, especially in the area of strategic management. Strategic planning should be timetabled into yearly programmes and adequate time allowed for consultation and implementation. Some systems that were in place when I arrived at Myross Bush eight years ago need reviewing due to roll growth and the development of the school.

I also want to review the best use of my time as leader of the school. I tend to use my classroom time as a reliever in rooms and this is not the most effective way of keeping up to date with classroom practice and curriculum changes. The professional development in Fiji, in particular, has given me tools to think more strategically. Instead of coming back with a raft of "what I should do back at school" ideas, I have come back with a better understanding of what my role is as the leader and ways to think more strategically about where the school is now and how we intend to go forward.

I have included the Literature Review on team building that I completed while on sabbatical leave.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The purpose for reviewing the literature for this action research paper was to build knowledge of research and thinking based around the determinants of successful team work. This knowledge will assist in identifying areas of team building needed to be implemented in a team I am currently involved in.

The chapter begins by first defining what a team is and the reasons why organizations choose to structure their members into teams. I then examine the literature on the stages a successful team passes through and the necessary components that need to be present in order to build an effective team.

Definition of 'Team'

The terms 'team' and 'group' are often used to describe the same thing, but Jones (2005) makes a differentiation by stating a group "can be a generic term covering two or more people working together, the term "team" conveys a deliberate assembling of people charged with achieving a task or tasks" (p. 22). The word 'deliberate' implies the specific selection of team members for a particular purpose. It becomes the task of the leader or team members to weld a group of individuals together in order to build a team so that tasks can be achieved and the members can gain satisfaction from working together in a cohesive and collaborative fashion.

Bolman and Deal (2003) outlined the work by Katzenbach and Smith (1993) which gives further detail to the task and the associated skills necessary to complete the task successfully.

> A team is a small number of people with complimentary skills, who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable. (p.12)

Katzenbach and Smith (1993) interviewed hundreds of people on more than 50 teams and drew a clear distinction between undifferentiated groups and sharply focussed teams. Their definition mentions the size of teams as being significant: anywhere between two and twenty five members is an appropriate number for a team to work in a cohesive manner. They also consider accountability important where all have a shared as well as individual responsibility in determining the success of the team's efforts.

Everard and Morris (1985, cited in Kemp& Nathan, 1990) believe it is important that a team has a clear focus on its processes and performance standards.

> A team is a group of people that can effectively tackle any task which it has been set to do. The contribution drawn from each team member is of the highest possible quality, and is one which could not have been called into play other than in the context of a supportive team. (p.134-135)

The Power of Teamwork
Teams can operate, at any time, as "wonderful or terrible, productive or stagnant, imprisoning or freeing, conformist or creative." (Bolman & Deal 2003 p.173)
If there is such a wide scope in how successful teams operate, why do so many organizations choose to work with teams?

> As modern organizations rely less on hierarchical coordination, groups have become even more important in such forms as self- managing teams, quality circles, and, ever increasingly, virtual groups whose members are linked by information technology." (Bolman & Deal 2003 p.173)

Today almost all important decisions made within an organization are made in teams. The need for teams starts at the top with senior managers or company directors no longer able to operate as autocrats, if an organization is to manage change successfully with all members able to continue working well together. As the tasks become more complex, the team responds and restructures into a more complex unit.

The synergy created from a high performing team means that the total output of the team is far greater than the sum of the output of each member. In other words, the team could

produce outcomes of a far higher quality than individuals could ever reach on their own (1+1+1+1=5).

Within education, teams are used in a variety of ways to complete tasks; administration issues; specific problems or common aims to bring about change; and at turbulent times such as a period of intense reform or economic/social pressure.

The culture of primary schools is changing towards staff working in a less autonomous fashion with structures more akin to working in teams. Research on effective professional development points to school-based, long term, professional development as being the most effective way of instigating change in teacher practice and student achievement. Teachers no longer need to be isolated in their cell-like classrooms. Colleagues are encouraged to review or peer critique their classroom practice in teams, form quality circles, work more collaboratively with peers in and out of school, to name a few examples of the shift to more widespread team based approaches.

I am a member of a team that has been set up to support the school's professional development focus for 2006-7: the Learning Media Literacy Professional Development Contract. There are nine schools involved in Southland. In May 2006 we were granted an extra $179,000 over a one year period (which may be extended a further year) from the Ministry of Education's Joint Initiative Funding Pool to release two Lead Teachers for one day a week each, release classroom teachers for up to $1,000 each, and to set up a Literacy Learning Community between the schools. The Literacy Learning Community was specifically designed to improve leadership practices in Literacy for Lead Teachers and Principals of the schools involved. The nine Principals coordinate the twice a term Literacy Learning Community meetings and they are usually held in conjunction with the Literacy Development Officers' half day Literacy Forums which are also held twice a term. The team is in the embryonic stage and it was an ideal opportunity to develop an action plan to assist with the development of this unique team.

Stages of Team Development
I set out to discover what the stages of team development were and there appear to be two major models that outline the stages that teams go through. The first is from Tuckman, (1965, cited in Jones 2005) in which he developed the following four major stages of development:
Forming – the group shows considerable anxiety due to not knowing the extent of the task or what is expected of them;
Storming – the conflict time as members struggle with why they are being asked to do the task and how are they going to do it;
Norming – members begin to cooperate with each other and the leader, plans begin to form, group cohesion begins and tentative experimenting begins; and
Performing – the real work starts, progress is made and the group structures itself to the best advantage.
Adair (2004) adds a final stage,

Dorming – where the group can lapse into routines and systems, the group becomes too comfortable and activity declines.

The second model is from Mohr and Dichter (2001) who identified the following six stages of team development:

The Honeymoon Stage (which precedes the first of Tuckman's stages.) The eager group may think this is going to be easy and may forget to build some common goals and boundaries;

The Conflict Stage – the honeymoon is over but the conflict is essential to work through in developing a healthy group;

The Confusion about Democracy Stage – who gets to have the voice and power;

The Messy Stage – experimenting, how to deal with mistakes, an unsettled time;

The Scary Stage – dealing with who is accountable and how the group can critique itself; and

The Mature Stage – the professional learning community is developed, high quality decisions are made based on data, meetings are professional development opportunities and about raising the standard of teaching and learning.

Both models are very similar in that the "Storming" stage in Tuckman's model is the same as the "Conflict" stage in Mohr and Dichter's. The "Norming "stage could take in Mohr and Dichter's "Confusion about Democracy", "Messy" stage and "Scary" stage. Both models acknowledge that the "Mature" or "Performing" stage is where all teams wish to get to – a fully functioning learning community where all members are committed to the team and individual needs meld naturally with the needs of the team.

It is important for team members to know about the stages of team development, not as an academic exercise but to be aware of what is coming up for the group as a whole. Knowing that conflict is a natural part of growth lessens the anxiety level of members and if the team is able to see where they want to go, that is, to the "Performing" or "Mature" stage they will have a far greater chance of reaching their goal.

Building an Effective Team

The final part of this chapter focuses on what components are necessary to build an effective team so that the team is operating at optimum level, in total alignment. Jazz musicians call it 'being in the groove' a state where the ensemble plays as one. It is widely acknowledged that effective teams need to be built: they don't just happen.

The theory about team building indicates that an effective team is made up of three distinct, yet inter-linked, sets of needs; the needs of the task, the team and the individual.

Figure 1.1
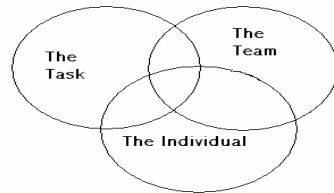
Task Needs
The team needs to focus on questions such as what? Why? How? Who? How well did we do to achieve its task?

Team Needs
In order to achieve its task the team itself needs to create its own culture and develop shared understandings. The team:

> establishes a social contract among members that relate to their purpose and guides and obligates how they will work together (Katzenbach & Smith 1993, cited in Bolman & Deal 2003 p.116).

Individual Needs
Although a team is working together it is made up of individuals who have needs that must be met if the team is to be successful.

Task Needs
Generally there is some direction given at the formation of a team, based on a need set by someone higher up, for example the manager of an organisation. To be successful the team members share an understanding of the vision related to the set tasks. The vision should reflect positive change to the status quo and be desired by the team members. All further planning reflects, in some way, the intent of the vision. Clear objectives and goals are formulated to allow the vision to become realistic and attainable and these are documented and agreed to by the whole team. Planning to meet team objectives is well organised, inclusive and effective. Realistic targets and time frames are put in place in the overall plan and resource allocation is tied in to clearly stated priorities.

Allocating appropriate roles within the team is another important consideration for successful team work. Tasks are to be allocated to those with expertise in particular areas. The team should be of a manageable size and develop the right mix of expertise for the tasks to be carried out. Belbin (1981, cited in Jones, 2005) has described a mix of

personalities that a productive team should have. He lists nine characteristics of team types and believes most people have a preferred role they wish to play. In reality, having the luxury of being able to choose team members based on the needs of the team, is very rare. Many teams within education are formed, not because of individual members' particular team type, but for other reasons, for example expertise and knowledge in a subject area. Other models simply look at teams needing logical thinkers, strong fighters and friends and helpers. Handy and Aitken (1996, cited in UNITEC Study Guide, 2006) state that all high performing teams need someone concerned with task (making sure the task is done) and someone concerned with process (participation of team members, developing others). Members should all have a clear understand their role, and the role of others in the team. As the team develops it is flexible enough to alter roles as the tasks become more complex. Katzenbach and Smith (1993, cited in Bolman & Deal 2003) found that a key characteristic of high performance teams was:

> mutual accountability, fostered when leaders shared in the work and team members shared in the leadership. (p.179)

Setting up a process of evaluation is another critical aspect of effective team work, for example incorporating milestone reports into its planning schedule to report to stakeholders**.** The team needs to be aware of the degree to which it has instigated positive change in line with the overall vision. The evaluation results can then be reflected on and further planning developed as a result of discussions.

Team Needs
Strong leadership is crucial in successful teams. The role of the leader is to help members of the team to achieve their personal best and work together in a collaborative way. An important aspect of team building is that members use opportunities to develop skills in other team members or the leader. The team is concerned with the personal and career development of all its members. The leader looks for opportunities to develop each member and members look for opportunities to develop each other and their leader.

The manner in which members communicate with each other during meetings and between meetings impacts greatly on how effectively the team will carry out the tasks it has been charged with. During meetings all members share the responsibility to maintain dialogue that challenges thinking and keeps the team focused on their tasks. To improve communication at a deeper level, members need to discuss and practice specific skills to enhance their performance as individuals and as a team. For example, practising the avoidance of defensive behaviours, the inclusion of open, high trust discussions and using dialogue effectively. Dialogue has the ability to go past any one individual's understanding and individuals gain insights that would not be able to be achieved on their own. "In dialogue people become observers of their own thinking" (Senge, 1990, p.242). Senge maintains that dialogue has the ability to expose prejudices, provided the participants are able to suspend their assumptions and examine issues from other

perspectives. Team members who are communicating effectively listen respectfully to each other and value a diverse range of opinions.

Procedures for communicating between meetings are established as well as clear inter-group communication channels. Decision making processes are evolved through discussion and are well understood by all members. Good decisions are based on collecting information, discussing options available, choosing the most appropriate option and acting on it. Delegation of decision making processes must be clear to all members.

If there is disagreement, conflicts and differences are resolved openly. Team members build a culture within the group of high trust and low defensiveness.
"Openness and trust in teams does not happen by accident "(Piggot-Irvine, 2002). Chris Argyris' research has revealed that conditioned defensiveness is the norm in our society. His work suggests that the difference between great teams and mediocre teams lies in how they face conflict and deal with the defensiveness that invariably surrounds conflict. Conflict should be an integral part of a team that is continually learning and challenging its own ideas. It is how the members deal with the conflict that determines their success. Defensive routines can block the flow of energy that helps a team achieve its common vision.

> It is not the absence of defensiveness that characterizes learning teams but the way defensiveness is faced (Senge, 1990, p.257).

Another difficulty that often faces a team is adapting to the change and challenge associated with becoming a member of the team. If members are experiencing difficulty with the structure of the team or the tasks expected of it, time must be allowed for them to discuss concerns and work collaboratively on solutions.

It is essential also that team plans are revisited and reviewed on a regular basis so that planning is flexible to meet the ever changing needs of the team and the tasks. The team can identify where they are at and what they need to do next in order to work towards achieving the overall vision.

Individual Needs
Close personal relationships do not necessarily develop as a result of team members working together. If people have been given the opportunity to get to know each other on a personal level they have a more solid foundation to work from when the team is in the midst of challenging situations. Recognising commonalities makes it easier to discuss differences: "It is helpful to remember that sometimes common interest is rooted in complimentary differences "(Lax & Sebenius 1986, cited in Bolman & Deal, 2003). If appropriate the more experienced members can share previous successes of the group. This background can help develop depth within the team.

If the majority or all of the above task and team needs are being met then the team will develop a strong sense of ownership and trust. Members will feel free to express their feelings as well as their ideas. They will accept responsibility for the effectiveness of the team and have a unified commitment to achieving the goals.

Teams enjoying a common purpose and approach inevitably hold themselves responsible, both as individuals and as a team, for the team's performance." (Katzenbach & Smith 1993, cited in Bolman & Deal, 2003, p.116)

People need to believe that the team can achieve more together than they could on their own, so there is value to them in being part of the team. The rewards for being part of the team must at least equal the input of the individual.

Conclusion

Tasks within education are commonly delegated to teams for a number of purposes ranging from curriculum demands to managerial and leadership responsibilities. It is widely accepted that teams whose members work effectively together, are able to surpass what the individual is able to achieve alone. However effective teams do not just happen, a group of brilliant individuals do not just automatically form a brilliant team. There needs to be well thought out structures in place so the team members are clear about their purpose together. A social contract between members needs to be developed so that the contribution of the team as a whole and as individuals is maximised. The more knowledge a team develops about the stages a typical team may go through as well as the components that make up a successful team, the more chance the team has of reaching its goal as a cohesive and collaborative unit.

The team I am involved with was developed out of an opportunity given to a group of nine schools in Southland for strengthening the literacy leadership of staff in an existing professional development contract run by Learning Media.

The task has been defined by the parameters of the fundholder and the application which was mainly developed by two members of the team. The team was formed, not from a mix of personalities necessary to work as a productive team, but from the school leaders of the nine schools. Very little time at this stage has been spent together developing the 'team culture' due to the time constraints of the funding application process in May, the amount of organisation needed to deal with the most pressing issues and subsequent workload of Principals in their own schools. This initiative of developing Literacy Leaders across a wide range of schools through a Learning Community is a new concept to us all. The 'task needs' are proving to be very challenging and little time has been used to address team and individual needs. This team has moved past the "Honeymoon "stage, (the success of the application and subsequent funding) and is very much at the "Forming" stage. It would benefit greatly from spending time working on team building skills to enhance the capability of its role for future tasks.

To enquire further into the workings of this team I need to use a research methodology that passes ownership onto the participants and uses collaboration to instigate positive change. The unique nature of the team means we are unlikely to source theoretical findings that can be applied to our situation. Therefore we, as practitioners need to become the researchers in order to investigate our own circumstance. The review of the literature has been useful to identify components of an effective team but how to ensure these components become part of the way the team operates in our own environment is a highly complex process of change requiring a collaborative research methodology.