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Essential Dynamics For Team Effectiveness In A Cross Functional Organizational Environment

Robert A. Bellacosa
Seton Hall University

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**ESSENTIAL DYNAMICS FOR TEAM EFFECTIVENESS
IN A
CROSS FUNCTIONAL ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT**

BY

ROBERT A. BELLACOSA

Thesis Advisor

Donald N. Lombardi, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

Essential Dynamics For Team Effectiveness in a Cross Functional Organizational Environment

A cross functional team exists when its members begin thinking like a team. The time it takes to build this consensus among team members varies. It depends on the complexity and scope of the initiative, the culture that the team members are working within and the amount of trust the individuals already feel. It also requires upgrading leadership and team member skills, and, finally, that the organizational culture become more interactive and less bureaucratic. In this study the author explores the key characteristics of successful cross functional team dynamics and benchmarks team participant perceptions based on their experiences in the evolving organizational structure of a Fortune 100 company. Through a comprehensive review of relevant literature related to cross functional teams and the creation and implementation of the cross functional team survey of 114 employees, the author discovered the barriers and pitfalls, as well as, the critical roles organizational culture, team leaders and team members have in creating and successfully maintaining effective cross functional teams. In addition, the author's previous experience as a cross functional team leader within this organization, and the experience and professional opinion of three external consultants, who worked on projects within the survey group, provided additional insight during the evaluation of survey data. Key areas highlighted in this study included clarity of purpose, team resources, organizational culture, rewards and recognition and overall team experience. Barriers to team effectiveness can come in many ways from a host of people including management, team members, stereotypes among stakeholders, competition between departments and key people, and a lack of interest or information sharing among those parties. With an understanding of why teams make sense and how they evolve, and an open-eyed view of what is required to participate as a team member, it is far more likely

they will succeed. Executives, team leaders and team members are at different levels of readiness for change. It is critical that top management whole-heartedly commit to implementing the team concept throughout the organization. The author recommends that training and development specialists utilize the findings in this study to further isolate the primary team behaviors vital to cross functional team dynamics, and create meaningful soft skill training curriculums for all levels of the organization. The goal here is to achieve team oriented skills that will not only improve individual performance, but contribute to the overall cross functional team success.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The past 10 years have seen a revolution in the way business is conducted. Gone are the strictly segregated internal departments, where programmers work only with programmers and marketers work only with marketers. In their place is the group of individuals with different skills, brought together to manage a project from start to finish (Sanders & Pascale, 1999).

Teamwork has become an essential aspect of business today. It allows management to go beyond the limits of a single individual and create, in essence, a more cohesive working machine. A successful team will have a variety of people that excel in different areas, not just in knowledge but in personality traits as well (Capezio, 1998).

Whether it is reengineering, downsizing, restructuring, process improvement, transformation, or some other vehicle for fixing organizations, one feature of the flexible organization of the 1990s and beyond is an emphasis on teams, both as a standard work system and for handling specific projects.

A team is more than just a group of people who are working together on something (Romig, 1996). According to Parker, "A team is a group of people with a high degree of interdependence, geared toward the achievement of a goal or the completion of a task. The key requirement is interdependence." (Parker, 1994)

In traditional hierarchical organizations each functional area works in isolation on their part of the process and then passes the activity to the next department in a serial decision-making process. Under these conditions, making decisions, resolving conflicts across functional areas and coordinating the product development process of several different products simultaneously becomes almost impossible to achieve (Peters & Tippet, 1995).

Unless the right dynamics are in place, these teams tend to function more as a group, in which strong individuals jostle for power and position. And despite the best intentions, teams become ineffective time wasters that have an unclear direction or members who cannot work together effectively (Marchwinski & Manziuk, 2000).

Cross functional work teams have become an essential part of organizations that want to succeed in today's competitive business environment. These work groups are comprised of experts from different departments in the organization who possess different skills and perform various job functions. The groups are prepared to act swiftly and flexibly to meet the company's changing needs (Hutt, Walker & Frankwick, 1995).

Henke, Krachenberg and Lyons (1993) believe that this concurrent, informed, consensus, decision-making model produces less likelihood of rework, redundancy, and inappropriate activities, as well as reduces the delays of knowledge transfer incurred with sequential activities performed by different people or groups.

Building cross functional capability is a lot harder than drawing lines on an organizational chart. It requires upgrading leadership and team-member skills. It also demands that the culture become more interactive and less bureaucratic (Maccoby 1999).

Many projects and problems require knowledge integration. According to Maccoby (1999), Parker (1994), Michalski (1998), and Linborg (1999) there is strong evidence that cross functional teams save time and money in developing new products and processes. In addition to providing speed, cross functional work teams can help solve complex problems, provide customer focus, encourage creativity, promote organizational learning and serve as a single point of contact.

There are, however, downsides to cross functional teams. Members may be total strangers or may not get along with one another (Parker, 1995). In addition, too much emphasis on cross

functional teams can erode a deep functional knowledge within an organization, thereby ending up with too many generalists (Maccoby, 1999).

When organizations put together cross functional teams, the first thing they seek are the requisite technical skills. But technical skills can be bought, begged or borrowed as needed. What really holds a team together are the team competencies such as; listening, speaking, dialog, feedback, group goal setting, meeting behaviors and conflict resolution (Finley & Robbins, 1995). Parker (1995) believes that several requirements must be met for a cross functional team to succeed. These include strong leadership, empowerment, shared goals, and an appropriate reward system.

Whatever their purpose or scope, however, cross functional teams are always defined in relation to their organizational context; that is, they are cross functional because they cross boundaries of existing organizational structures (Lindborg, 1997).

In practice, however, the author has found that cross functional teams have become a preferred mechanism to rapidly respond to competitive market driven needs. The Individual Insurance Department in this study, however, has been less than successful in incorporating cross functional project teams into its traditional hierarchical organizational structure.

The focus of this study is to explore the essential dynamics for successful cross functional teams. The author accomplishes this by drawing on two sources of expertise; the perception of actual team members at multiple levels of the organization in question, and the comprehensive literature review of published materials. In addition, a third source; the experience and professional opinion of three external consultants, provided feedback to the author during the evaluation of survey data.

Research Question

What are the essential dynamics for project team effectiveness in a cross functional organizational environment? This study explores that question by examining the workplace attitudes of 114 employees at multiple levels in the Individual Insurance Department of a Fortune 100 financial company.

Subsidiary Questions

In an attempt to understand the essential dynamics for project team success, this study also addresses the following questions:

1. Why establish cross functional teams?
2. What does the organization need to do to adequately support cross functional teams?
3. What are the defining characteristics of an effective cross functional project team?
4. What barriers can inhibit cross functional team effectiveness?
5. What are the benefits of successful team dynamics to team members and the organization?

The author answers these questions through a review of pertinent literature and survey of 114 employees who have actively participated on one or more cross functional teams within the 36 month period from June, 2000 to June, 2003. While the literature provides a foundation for the essentials of team success, the data received in the survey also serves to benchmark the attitudes and perceptions of employees on their cross functional team experiences in such areas as clarity of purpose, team resources, organizational culture, rewards and recognition and overall team experience.

Need for the Study

The Individual Life Insurance Department is comprised of nearly 19,000 employees nationwide. In late 2001, a review of initiatives, either underway or planned for implementation in 2002, required over 650 employees to participate as team members on one or more cross functional team. In total, 1245 cross functional team initiatives were identified with five or more employees.

While a Project Management Standards Committee was created to standardize the management of initiatives and to serve as mechanism for managing cross functional teams, the information was introduced to the organization in 1999 via the intranet as a self-study management course, rather than a mandatory organizational requirement. Furthermore, while the standardization of project management format and report tracking was developed, a critical oversight was in not addressing people issues associated with being on a team. As a result, individual team member behaviors, combined with a department silo culture, proved to be less than efficient and led to significant morale problems among the staff. The words “welcome to the team” are viewed as the “kiss of death” to an employee’s personal and career development.

The strengths of those perceived to be strong team leaders, in many cases, became the weaknesses of the cross functional team. In the absence of team training, the typical team developed the style of the leader, and employees who acted like team members were perceived as wanting more power rather than wanting to help the team succeed.

The reality in this department is that a large majority of teams were, in fact, functioning as work groups. Most employees simply operated as if they were in their normal work environment, rather than embarking on a unique opportunity to have an impact on the business. The result has been ongoing confusion in the organization and less than lackluster performance in delivering high quality initiatives, within budget and on time.

While establishing project management standards was a noteworthy accomplishment, the committee subsequently disbanded in December, 2001. Today standards are not being used or monitored for uniform application, and team member issues such as selection, responsibilities and rewards remain open.

Objectives

In conducting a study that sufficiently looks at the essential dynamics for team effectiveness in a cross functional organizational environment, the author identified two objectives. The first objective is to clearly define the characteristics of an effective cross functional team. Part of this effort was to gather employee attitude and perceptions. Second, the author created a reference or framework for department leaders, team leaders and team members to recognize the dynamics of effective teamwork and the pitfalls and challenges to avoid.

Definition of Terms

1. Traditional Hierarchical Organizational Structure: An organization in which each functional area works in isolation on their part of the process, and then passes the activity to the next department in a serial decision-making process.
2. Functional Area: An area within the organization that has specific accountability for a particular part of a process in the achievement of an overall organizational goal. Examples of functional areas include: sales, marketing, systems, technology, new business processing, operations, customer service, accounting, design, planning, production, advertising.
3. Team: The word team comes from the Indo-European word *deuk*, meaning “to pull”. The word team literally means “pulling together”. Simply stated a team is people doing something together. It is not the *something*, but the *together* part that makes it a team (Romig, 1995). A team is a group of individuals with complementary skills and a high

degree of interdependence, who are committed to a common purpose and common performance goals, and who hold themselves mutually accountable. "The key requirement is interdependence." (Parker, 1994, p. 35)

4. Interdependence: Mutual dependence.

5. Functional Team: A functional team is comprised of individuals who are based in the same work unit or share a common function. They address select problems and must rely on working together to produce the results expected for their department. The purchasing department is an example of this type of team.

6. Cross Functional Team: A cross functional team consists of individuals who represent several different departments or functions. They often work on projects that combine job functions. "Those individuals from departments within the firm whose competencies are essential in achieving an optimal evaluation," with at least "one core member from each primary function of the organization" (Clark and Wheelwright, p.6).

7. Project Team: A project team configures a group of people around a defined piece of work for a defined time span. Some will work exclusively on a single project throughout its life span. Others are "time-shared" - working on a number of projects at once, and dropping in and out of active involvement on an as-needed basis at different phases in the project's development". Project teams have structure – that is, there are established rules governing the relationships of team members with each other, with the project manager, with the client, and with the product or process being developed. A well structured team can enhance the probability of project success, while a poorly structured team will lead to trouble (Peters and Tippets, 1995).

8. Teamwork: The ability to work together toward a common vision and direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives. It is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.

9. Work Group: A group of individuals from the same or different departments, in which the team leader makes all the critical decisions.

10. Self-Directed Team: A functional team which works together on an ongoing, day-to-day basis and who are responsible for a “whole” work process or segment. They set the team goal and inspect their own work and share and rotate leadership responsibilities; team members have equal input in decisions.

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitations in this study are related to data collection from one department and, specifically, to the cross functional type team structure. The author is primarily concerned with reporting employees' perceptions of their experience on cross functional teams as a benchmark for measuring the department's evolution to a cross functional team culture. The 114 employees surveyed represent all levels of the organization including administrative support, junior management, middle management and senior management. Collectively, this group has been involved on one or more cross functional teams for a three month to eighteen month period between June, 2000 and June, 2003. Specific areas of team focus are limited to new product, process or market development. This is a select industry and cannot, then, possibly represent the thinking on cross functional work by corporate entities nationwide, nor represent the thinking of every individual who has worked in such an environment.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Teams: An Overview

At the height of the American Revolution, Benjamin Franklin said, "We must all hang together, or in the end we will all hang separately." In other words, people's very lives hung in the balance and depended on cooperation, trust and common understanding of purpose. Today the stakes are not quite as high, but employees must learn to "hang together" more effectively because doing so simply makes competitive business sense.

The Industrial Age hit its apex with the development of scientific management. This theory, propounded by Frederick Taylor, attempted to optimize the productivity of organizations by assigning minute tasks to individual members. There were "big" bosses, levels of managers, supervisors and at the bottom of the organization were multitudes of rank-in-file employees, each one assigned a single, simple task, such as tightening a screw or attaching a hose or stamping a document.

The evolution of technology in the workplace ratcheted the development of the commercial mainframe computer and by the late 1950s, large companies were able to perform functions that were unthinkable in the 1920s. Teams were basically extinct, as Corporations formed groups of professionals bound by functional skills - accounting, design, information services - shifting emphasis from uneducated manufacturing crews to well educated professional functional groups.

By the mid-1960s, Corporations had become so immense that they were utterly out of touch with their customers. A deep trench separated management from workers; management was deemed the brains of the operation, and workers were the muscle. In addition, labor relations had become an internal adversarial force to the point of either intra-company war or protecting worker employment thus creating the rise of a complacent work force. It further

divided the work force into classes; and virtually closed down any possibility of employees, at all levels and functions of an organization, working hand-in-hand in a collaborative work effort.

The resurgence of Japan, Germany and other countries from World War II devastation, brought about experimentation with new models for large corporations seeking competitive organization efficiencies. Ironically, the "new" engine would turn out to be the old pyramid on its head and would restore the focus to the forgotten, basic unit of operations - the workgroup or team.

Through the 1970s Japanese employees, working largely in teams, proceeded to surpass America in design, manufacturing, production and technology. While they initially lacked natural resources, state-of-the-art infrastructure, money or technology, they did have motivated people with the cultural disposition to work together and the vision and patience to chart a strategy and see it through. Instead of reconstructing the traditional top-down hierarchical organization structure, every worker, in every function, at every level, was made part of the company team. And the mission was clear and simple - continuous improvement of processes. No idea, no worker was too small. Everyone participated.

Over this past decade, American business continued to work very hard to seek out any possible competitive advantage in the pursuit of growth, market share and profitability. Businesses are requiring that more be accomplished with fewer resources. And in many cases, cross functional skill sets are serving to ensure proper planning, design and implementation. Reengineering, process redesign, restructuring, and enhanced delivery system technology initiatives have gained widespread popularity as a means to improve operating structures and overall business profit.

Timeliness to market is essential in most industries and cross functional teams rated as an essential contributing factor for getting a project completed in a fast paced development cycle. (Cooper 1995). While working on cross functional teams may place greater demands

on individuals, the combined results of the team effort outweigh those demands. Thus working on cross functional teams can contribute to an improved working environment (Cordero, Farris, and DiTomaso 1998).

In the minds of Americans, the word "teamwork" conjures up a diverse range of images, from spectacular game-winning sports, to our military efforts around the world, to volunteering ones time for a worthy cause. In business, teams have not just become respectable, they are widely regarded as the only practical way to handle a complex, technical and rapidly changing environment (Leigh, 1999).

Using cross functional teams allows management to go beyond the weaknesses of a single individual to create, in essence, a more knowledge-based, customer focused working machine. A successful cross functional team will have a variety of people that excel in difference areas, not just in knowledge but in personality traits as well (Capezio, 1998).

Project failure is pervasive among all industries. The change in the structure of work has brought with it a change in the way work is managed. Today's managers leading project teams must find ways to get their projects completed while contending with complicated issues of group dynamics (Parker, 1996).

Employees must learn and be led to cooperate and work together because the costs of not doing so are too great. Failing to increase and leverage middle management and front-line employee cooperation and teamwork is, in the end, a failure to capture an additional source of competitive advantage that is sorely needed in today's marketplace.

The main difference between effective and ineffective cross functional teams is whether or not they pull together. Ineffective teams lack alignment, so team members are pulling in different directions. The result is wasted energy. They are viewed as an end in and of themselves, and little time, money and resources are invested to help them succeed. (Leigh, 1999). Such teams make little difference to the company other than to allow it to use

the word “team” to describe their internal structure, and the team members are actually more frustrated than they were before the team was created (Finley & Robbins, 1995).

By contrast, effective teams pull in the same direction to achieve the team's goals. They are viewed as a strategy, a synergistic blending of human resources, for achieving an organization's goals. Money, effort and, most important, patience and support are invested eagerly. (Woods, 1997). There is strong recognition that operating as a team is different from what we are used to from our experiences at school and at home and that, in order to be successful, we need to learn how to play by the new rules (Finley & Robbins, 1995).

Finally, Parker (1999), Katzenback and Smith (1993) and Henke, et al. (1993) agree that teams help people, whose work is already interdependent, to work together better. If managers, team leaders, and team members understand this, then the team will be able to deal with challenges better, learn from the experience, and continuously improve their performance.

Defining a Cross Functional Team

Cross functional work teams have become an essential part of organizations in today's competitive business environment. These work groups are comprised of experts from different departments in the organization who possess different skills and perform various job functions (Romig, 1995). A cross functional team is typically comprised of people from all functions who, at one time or another, are involved in the design, development and implementation of the product for which they all are responsible (Linborg, 1997).

Customers are increasingly asking for solutions to their problems. This requires cross functional teams not only to package products, but also to develop new applications and services that encompass an end-to-end customer experience. This kind of partnering has also stimulated ideas that energize the R&D process (Maccoby, 1999). Cross functional teams are prepared to act swiftly and flexibly to meet the company's changing needs. Aside from providing speed, they can help solve complex problems, provide customer focus, encourage creativity, promote organizational learning and serve as a single point of contact.

Many organizations have working groups that call themselves teams. A group that produces work based on a combination of individual contribution is not a team. Teams produce work that is based on collective effort. (Maccoby, 1999) On most projects, team skills are just as important as the technical skills. This is particularly true when players from multiple disciplines with varying skill levels, experiences and objectives are involved (Sanders and Pascale, 1999).

According to Katzenbach and Smith (1993), ideally the cross functional team is a small group of key players from each affected functional area who have been carefully chosen for complementary skills and who are committed to a common goal and are mutually accountable for the team's success. Cross functional teams are characterized by these factors: (Parker, 1999)

- Speed. Cross functional teams tend to accomplish tasks quickly—especially in the area of product development—because they utilize parallel development rather than serial

development. In other words, cross functional teams develop different aspects of a project simultaneously instead of sequentially.

- Complexity. Cross functional teams improve the organization's capacity to solve complex problems because such problems transcend traditional disciplines and functions.
- Customer focus. Cross functional teams help focus the organization's resources on satisfying customers' needs.
- Creativity. Cross functional teams help increase the creative capacity of the organization by bringing together people with different backgrounds, orientations, cultural values, and styles.
- Organizational learning. Cross functional team members learn more about other disciplines and tend to develop new technical and job skills more readily because they work across job functions. They also learn how to work with people with different backgrounds and styles.
- Single point of contact. Members of cross functional teams promote more effective teamwork by acting as a single source of information and decision making regarding projects and customers.

Organizations of all sorts seem to feel that teams are the solution to whatever they have, and that is not completely wrong. But the performance improvements that managers seek when they decide to jump on the team bandwagon just do not happen automatically. Teamwork takes work (Uhlfeder, 1996).

Hutt, Walker & Frankwick (1995) offer an explanation. Some team members have not met before their first team meeting. They are virtually strangers. The design engineer from the Detroit plant may never have talked with the dealer from Pennsylvania who sells the cars she designs. The marketing professional may never have run into the government affairs attorney, even though both work in the same office.

Some team members may be colleagues who have worked together on past projects. If the purchasing and manufacturing managers on a team agree on customer needs, the

managers' past association can help jump-start the team. But if the managers are old enemies in a turf war, the team may begin with a conflict that needs resolving. For cross functional teams to succeed several requirements must be met including: strong leadership, empowerment, shared goals, and an appropriate rewards (Hutt, Walker & Frankwick, 1995).

Building an effective team can unleash the tremendous creative potential in others. When people work together they find new solutions to existing problems, third alternatives to either/or situations and feel satisfaction in knowing that their contributions are valuable and workable (Linborg, 1997). When people know that they are contributing to something bigger than themselves and that their contributions are invaluable to the project, they become committed to finding workable solutions, and the result is an interdependent synergy that produces exceptional results.

In traditional hierarchical organizations each functional area works in isolation on their part of the process and then passes the activity to the next department in a serial decision making process. Conversely, a cross functional team brings together an array of specialists who jointly and simultaneously make design and manufacturing decisions. Henke, Krachenberg, and Lyons (1993) believe that this concurrent, informed, consensus, decision making model produces less likelihood of rework, redundancy, and inappropriate activities, as well as reduces the delays of knowledge transfer incurred with sequential activities performed by different people or groups.

Studies have shown cross functional teams to be mechanisms for enhanced efficiency, increased motivation, synergistic output, flexibility, and heightened confidence (Peters & Tippet, 1995). Henke et al. (1993) point out that these characteristics of successful cross functional teams are the critical factors in successful product development. Most development initiatives, by nature, usually involve some degree of risk. Throughout the entire development life cycle people need to be aware of and poised to address, rapidly changing conditions in a dynamic competitive environment. Under these conditions, making decisions, resolving conflicts across functional areas and coordinating the development

process of several different products simultaneously becomes almost impossible to achieve within a typical hierarchical structure.

By using cross functional teams, decision making is made through the use of a lateral decision process, which can cut across the traditional vertical lines of functional authority, speeding the decision making process and increasing the chance of “buy-in” and cooperation from all affected departments (Woods, 1997). Presuming that clear corporate objectives are consistently understood within the team, there is a significantly greater potential of high quality decisions occurring through the joint decision making process.

The decision making and action producing process used by cross functional teams act together to speed up the overall cycle time by reducing sequential knowledge transfer activities, reducing rework, improving the flow of communication, and increasing knowledge at lower levels of the organization (Capezio, 1998). The increase of knowledge additionally improves future decision making even down to daily operating level decisions with corporate strategy and objectives.

Cross functional teams that are charged with identifying and anticipating problems, generating solutions, and making a range of decisions can be enormously useful for companies. This is especially true in companies that must face constant change in the marketplace and other aspects of the environment, and that must innovate and improve their functions on a consistent basis.

Whatever their purpose or scope, however, cross functional teams are always defined in relation to their organizational context; that is, they are cross functional because they cross the boundaries of existing structures. A cross functional team differs from other work groups in a number of important ways (D. Romig, 1996):

- The team’s purpose cannot be accomplished without the involvement, perspectives, and expertise of more than one department or function.

- The team focuses on an issue or process with several “owners.” More than one first-line manager or supervisor is responsible for the areas affected.
- Members come from different departments, functional areas, or disciplines.
- Team results depend upon the buy-in of persons across the organization.
- The team contributes to organizational learning. It contributes to the organization’s self-understanding and future performance.

Why work in cross functional teams? The fact is that when cross functional teams work well, the people involved build on each other's strengths and talents with the result that they can accomplish more together than the individuals could do separately (Capezio, 1998). Coming to the table with different experience, knowledge and skill sets and varying opinion can broaden a team’s vision. And team members, since they are working together, can build each other up and help each other work through difficult problems (Parker, 1996).

Teams, by their very nature, focus on problem-solving instead of tasks. Traditionally, managers who have a long-term goal or vision delegate tasks to individuals who may or may not understand the big picture. But because they are working together, everyone involved in a team has to understand the group’s vision. And the more complex the vision, the more important it is to build a team that ensures members a mutual understanding of the team’s priorities and aims (Michalski, 1998).

Katzenback and Smith (1991) offer this example. Consider digging a hole, for example. It’s a very, very simple task. It does not matter if someone is on board or not on board, committed to the success of the project or not. Wrestling a shovel to get dirt out does not require an individual commitment, it requires arm strength. But if you’re coming up with a software program, there are thousands of interdependent parts of code that have to work together. If you do not, all one person has to do is miss a few things and the whole project can fall apart .

Successful cross functional teams affect an organization in two important ways; first they bring about improvements that cannot be accomplished by departments or functions working alone. Second, they change the “world-view” of the organization and of the individual team members, moving them to greater interdependence. For cross functional teams to be valuable in the long run, they require practical, common sense development of systems, core values and skill sets. Cross functional teams bring together people with differing perspectives and knowledge to achieve the best possible results. In value terms, cross functional teams rely on diversity and interdependence. (Lindborg, 1997)

Need For The Right Organizational Culture

Traditional Hierarchical Culture:

Globalization, along with the change in the United States to a service economy, has prompted organizations to transform themselves in order to maintain and achieve leadership and enterprise agility. The structure of the organization is the formal means by which it coordinates the activities of its workforce to accomplish its goals and objectives.

Periodically, organizations must restructure in order to stay competitive and efficient. The new environment requires a fresh look at the strategic visions and assumptions that have historically driven the organization. This new organization requires new roles and responsibilities, with a new set of management practices.

Gumpert (1998) notes that in traditional hierarchical systems based on authority, power, and bureaucracy, decisions tend to be made close to the top of the departmental or corporate pyramid, often on the grounds that decision-makers are the only ones who have enough of the "big picture" to make them properly. Helgesen (1995) identifies characteristics that define traditional hierarchies, such as pyramid structure, focus on formalities, and information channel constraints, and found that these characteristics tend to reinforce one another. The communications protocol of a hierarchical organization accentuates the importance of rank within the organization and keeps the focus on what position a person has attained.

Hierarchical systems also create departmental "silos" that impede both communication and collaboration among them. They assume that everyone is accountable for carrying out his job. If something is not attended to, it is deemed the fault of some person who has not done the job correctly, or has not seen to it that others do their work. In times of change, however, there are always gaps between silos or functions. These gaps often appear as unexpected barriers and difficulties that people encounter. Thus people do not understand much about the jobs of people outside their realms of direct action, and do not understand the difficulties that people in other areas encounter (Helgesen, 1995).

The vision of early 20th century industrialists, most notably Henry Ford, ushered in the idea of specialization of labor and a new organizational structure was born. The assembly line brought about organization structure in which many highly specialized “functions” performed their specific tasks in a sequential and repetitive fashion, allowing quick delivery of the product to the consumer for the lowest possible cost. In the evolution from the one person team, where one person did everything, we progressed to the division of labor structure where there were many functional specialists, each performing a highly-skilled yet very narrow serial task.

Over time, these specialist areas grew more self-serving and limited parochial interests began to create artificial barriers between the functions. The ambition concerns of department functions became the primary focus, many times taking precedence over the needs of the consumer. As each specialized function gained in autonomy they devised and worked to their own standards. Only when a function became sufficiently satisfied with its work did the end product get passed to the next serial function.

Surprisingly, the process that had originally cut production time significantly was now responsible for significantly increasing product-to-market time. What has become clear is that if the highly specialized and extensive functional knowledge silos could be tapped and utilized in a synergistic and simultaneous fashion, new products could be more innovative while being brought to market more quickly.

Many organizational management researchers (Helgesen, 1995; Henke et al., 1993; Hutt, Walker, & Frankwick, 1995; Parker, 1994; Proehl, 1996) have confirmed that regardless of organizational flattening or reengineering efforts, you cannot superimpose a cross functional team on a hierarchy and expect it to work. Helgensen (1995) cites the highly structured nature of a hierarchy is one reason that piece-meal efforts to reform or flatten pyramidal structures have so often floundered, despite good intentions and detailed plans. The top-down emphasis on power and privilege tends to assure that the kind of people who emerge as leaders in traditional hierarchies are those who are comfortable with

exercising power from a distance and making unilateral decisions. These are not the kind of leaders necessary for leading necessary flexible reactive organizations or for leading cross functional teams.

Helgesen (1995) further points out that restricted access to information strengthens the power and dominance of the organization's top leaders, creating the kind of system that isolates people who are not in leadership positions rather than broadly involving them in the overall process. Going to a cross functional team culture could be personally counterproductive for these leaders, who are the very people who need to sponsor the activity to change the organizational culture. With a changing business environment, increased customer demands and shorter turnaround times, it takes more than streamlining operations or refining processes to keep up.

Cross Functional Team Culture:

Cross functional teams are a way of working together that signals a shift in organizational thinking, a shift toward process and project, and away from function and department. In a cross functional culture, teams are formed by members from various functional areas to work in a complimentary way to a common objective. Many large firms have restructured operations such that work is defined as a portfolio of projects linked to the overall business strategy. Enterprise-wide projects are prioritized according to key business drivers. Here, cross functional team members share mutual accountability. They form, disperse and reform, bringing the right talents, resources, and focus to get the job done in a compressed schedule for delivery (Fleming and Koppelman, 1997)

Trent and Monczka (1994) assert that most U.S. firms, even after indicating a willingness to pursue cross functional integration, still structure themselves traditionally. In many cases, the culture of the firm encompasses decades of established business practices and formal functional reporting structures and is not a trivial task to realign. Switching to a cross functional organization structure may not be possible or desirable and

the reality is that cross functional teams, if they are to exist at all, need to survive in a functionally aligned environment.

Organizations adopt a cross functional structure for different reasons. Some view teams as the basic building block of a flatter more efficient operation. Others see teamwork as a way to greater unity, improved performance, high quality products, and better service.

Building cross functional team capability is a lot harder than drawing lines on an organizational chart. It takes more than putting several people together in a room and telling them, "You're a team. Go." A team only exists when its members begin thinking like a team, and the time it takes to build this consensus among team members varies. It depends on the complexity and scope of the project, the culture that the team members are working within and the amount of trust the individuals already feel. It also requires upgrading leadership and team member skills, and, finally, that organizational culture become more interactive and less bureaucratic. (Maccoby, 1999).

Parker (1994) concludes that a group of allies, strangers, and even enemies can weave a cross functional design that is a patchwork of the members' different cultures. But it takes more than just putting together a diverse group of people. In practice, it requires the migration from a parochial view of the world in which one's own function, values, and goals are paramount to a culture that says, "We're all in this together." Success is team success; rewards are team rewards. And if the team fails, everyone shares the responsibility.

The diversity within cross functional teams creates a whole new culture. A team made up of six engineers who report to one engineering manager may work together more easily, but a cross functional team is more likely to exemplify the axiom, "The whole is greater than the sum of its parts."

Maccoby (1999) warns, however, that Companies changing to a team culture often create teams for every problem. This "team mania" quickly overwhelms many employees.

Soon, they cannot get their normal work done because they are involved in six or seven teams. This situation causes disenchantment with team involvement, erodes commitment to team participation.

Change in structure brings with it change in the way work is managed. Managers leading teams must find ways to get their projects completed while contending with complicated issues of group dynamics. A team culture must have leadership that models and maintains it.

Yet even in organizations committed to a team culture and recognition of team performance, the most successful work group project and cross functional teams were determined by two critical factors; the actions and skills of the team leader and the strategic "fit" and planning of teams by top management. (Myers, 1999).

Many organizations view the movement toward the team concept as a method to deal with the changing business environment, facing U.S. industry. The team concept requires organizations to alter the basic way they approach business. The barriers to implementation range from the design of the workflow to the willingness of managers, team leaders and team members to fully accept new levels of power and accountability. Maccoby (1999) concludes that a key element to the success of the team approach is the ability of all organizational members to adapt to a new employee-management relationship.

Barriers and Solutions to Cross Functional Team Effectiveness

Many organizational management researchers (Helgesen, 1995; Henke et al., 1993; Hutt, Walker, & Frankwick, 1995; Parker, 1994; Proehl, 1996) have confirmed that the highly structured nature of a hierarchy is one reason that piecemeal efforts to reform or flatten pyramidal structures have so often floundered, despite good intentions, costly consultants, and detailed plans. The top-down emphasis on power and privilege tends to assure that the kind of people who emerge as leaders in traditional hierarchies are those who are comfortable with exercising power from a distance and making unilateral decisions. These are not the kind of leaders necessary for leading flexible growth-oriented organizations or for leading cross functional teams.

Helgesen (1995) further points out that restricted access to information strengthens the power and dominance of the organization's top leaders, creating a kind of caste system that isolates people who are not in leadership positions rather than broadly involving them in the overall process. By imposing an exclusionary culture that dictates who, by virtue of rank, will not be invited to a meeting, or who has a right to particular information, or who may not communicate directly with whom, people in leadership positions are elevated and their positions are strengthened. Going to a team culture could be personally counterproductive for these leaders, who are the very people who need to sponsor the activity to change the organizational culture.

Despite the best intentions, teams can be ineffective, time-wasters that lack a clear direction or have members who cannot work together effectively. At their best, however, teams work because most people are goal-oriented social beings who gain a sense of satisfaction from accomplishing objectives with others (Proehl, 1996). But to achieve this ideal, the members of a team must have a common objectives, clear roles and goals, the resources need to work productively, and enough loyalty to see a project through to completion.

There is a reason why nearly every company in the Fortune 500 institute teams. Teams are more effective at executing and improving processes, reducing costs, and building a committed workforce (Finley & Robbins, 1995). While that sounds great, it is not that easy. There are lots of opportunities for team initiatives in organizations to fail. The result is frustrated managers, frustrated employees, and no real difference in performance from the old hierarchy, boss-subordinate days.

Barriers to team effectiveness can come in a host of ways from a host of people including management, team members, stereotypes among stakeholders, competition between departments and key people, and a lack of interest or information sharing among those parties.

Team Challenges Caused By Management:

Management is not always to blame for why teams fail to produce expected results, but it certainly plays an important role. Here are some ways management influences impacts a team:

- Management fails to create the culture in which teams will either prosper or falter. If the culture does not support open communication, cooperation, and delegation of authority and responsibility to the people doing the work, teamwork is not going to happen.
- Management institutes teams for activities in which teams are necessarily appropriate. Teams are not always necessary for all organization activities. For example, a team may not be appropriate in a customer service operation, where each person responds to customer questions. Team activities can take time away from answering phones, but would not make employees more efficient.
- Management does not provide leadership and support of the team initiative. The killer barrier to effective cross functional teams is a lack of managerial support.

Employees must believe that management is there to provide the resources and information the team needs to accomplish its mission. Without on-going leadership and support from management, team members will not take participation seriously.

Kratzenbach and Smith (1991) state that a strong team culture emphasizes the quality of leadership. Teams need more than managing if they are to deliver the kind of outstanding results that justify teamwork in the first place. Yet again, one seldom sees organizations with a clear idea of the type of leadership required to run successful, not just competent, teams. Effective managerial support can include:

- providing the time, training, funds, people, and equipment,
 - “talking and walking” teamwork,
 - recognizing and rewarding teams and team members,
 - communicating a vision, charter, or broad goals,
 - breaking down old paradigms and procedures,
 - modeling teamwork, in that management itself works as an effective team.
-
- Management fails to establish and communicate a consistent, decision making process for the team. What constitutes a failing or failed team effort? From a decision making perspective, cross functional teams are assembled to make particularly complex decisions. A team’s task is completed when all relevant decisions have been made, or when the team makes provisions for other entities to make decisions. For example, by delegation to individuals or smaller teams. A team’s work cannot be considered complete or successful until the intended decisions have been made on time. There are several factors that impede progress toward decisions making in teams (Woods, 1997):
 - Seeking a consensus in all decisions.
 - No sense of deadline among all or some of the members of the team.
 - Seeking one global decision as opposed to making progress through incremental decision making, i.e., several smaller decisions that progressively lead to the

completion of the team's entire task.

- Locking team into a data collection or analysis mode and never moving on to a decision making mode, i.e., never making choices among alternatives.
- Management creates a large team. Many cross functional teams violate one of the fundamental principles of effective teams: Smaller is better. Studies show repeatedly that the ideal team has four to seven members, certainly no more than 10 members. Yet, many cross functional teams try to operate with 25, 35, or even 50 members and above.
- Management selection of team members. When organizations put together cross functional work teams, the first thing they seek are the requisite technical skills. But technical skills can be bought, begged or borrowed as needed. What really holds teams together are the team competencies such as listening, speaking, dialog, feedback, group goal setting, meeting behaviors and conflict resolution.
- Management institutes teams but does not provide for teamwork training. Just because a company calls a group of people who work together a team does not mean they are a team. Teams are championed to improve many aspects of organizational performance, including customer service, productivity, employee morale, and job satisfaction. But not all teams are successful.

One major cause of team failure is the lack of appropriate training for team members. Team training is most productive when it focuses on important behavioral and process subjects needed for group success. Training in interpersonal communication, decision making, meeting skills, and the tools of process management are all required if teams are to succeed. If management is not ready to commit to training, the team will falter and fail to meet expected results. Training material is used most effectively when it is presented at a logical point during team development (Michalski, 1998).

- Management does not change the compensation system. A nagging issue for cross functional teams is whether team members receive credit for their performance on teams. Typically, departmental managers are responsible for employee appraisals. Employees often complain that their managers do not consider their work on teams in their performance evaluations.

Most approaches to compensation in traditional, non-team oriented organizations focus on individual performance and even reward employees who look good in relation to their peers. If employees see that there is no compensation for performing as a team (rather than as individuals), then they are not going to take teamwork seriously.

Kratzenbach and Smith (1991), Longenecker and Neubert (2000), Hutt et al. (1995) and Parker (1994) agree that as teams proliferate, organizations must shift the emphasis of their recognition programs from individual to team rewards. Organizations will always need to recognize outstanding individuals, but an effective recognition program must also reward the collaborative efforts of teams. Companies need to get away from a star system that rewards only the individuals who stand out from the crowd, but also reward people who help the crowd perform better.

Parnell (1996) sees this as a formidable culture change for many companies that have traditionally relied on creating and rewarding star performers. Building a credible reward system demands a clear opinion about what a successful or unsuccessful team actually looks like.

- Management fails to cooperate with other department or functional managers. Breakdowns in communication among corporate leaders can decrease performance and productivity and result in wasted resources and effort. When managers are not working together morale also decreases and ill will and bad feelings grow.

The firm often fails to fix these problems and improve its processes, which can mean a loss of focus on customers (both internal and external) and profits. Counterproductive workplace conflicts and political activities proliferate, causing a rise in job-related stress and workplace tension. Finally at a time when firms are calling upon their work forces to cooperate in a host of teaming activities, the lack of cooperation among the leaders sets a poor example for the work force at large.

These problems are not the characteristics of an organization practicing continuous improvement or one that is in search of excellence. They reflect an organization that is hurting itself by its own behavior and is willing to accept unacceptable behavior on the part of its managers. When management does not work together and cooperate, the things that follow come at great expense to productivity, planning, communication, stress levels, and morale.

Solutions: The way to correct management-caused team challenges is to commit to training and developing a culture, reward and recognition system, and support system that will serve as a solid foundation for teamwork. Management must also be willing to tear down the walls of silos and take the long view that teams will work.

Team Challenges Caused By Team Members:

While management clearly has a hand in the success or failure of a team, team members themselves also make mistakes that undermine performance. Here are some key areas:

- **Interpersonal relationships.** A persistent barrier to effective cross functional teamwork is the failure of people to work well together in groups. Many people in the workplace are poorly prepared to function as team players. Few people take courses in group dynamics or few are naturally endowed with group-process and problem solving skills.

The diversity within cross functional teams makes them especially susceptible to poor interpersonal relationships, conflicts between team members, and a lack of trust and candor. Members bring ingrained work styles developed through their associations with similar people in functional areas outside the team (Finley and Robbins, 1995).

Solution: The key to overcoming those barriers is training to help team members develop positive norms, resolve conflicts and gain consensus.

- **Different Work Styles Interfere With Cooperation.** Some team members may be fast learners and very skilled at their tasks. Others may be slower and less proficient on the job. Such differences can cause conflicts that interfere with the cooperation and erode member confidence in each other that is at the heart of why teams exit in the first place.

Solutions to work style challenges include (Parker, 1999):

- Have performance standards in place that team members understand and that facilitates cooperation and team building.
 - Give team members jobs that are appropriate to their skills and work styles.
 - Create an open communication team environment where members can talk to each other and work out any conflicts.
-
- **Unrealistic Expectations.** Sometimes when a team is instituted team members have an unrealistic understanding regarding the goals and objectives of the mission. For example, team members may want to interact with customers and suppliers and take on other responsibilities that are not. The result is disappointment and a lack of commitment that undermines the team's chances of succeeding.

Solution: Make sure the team knows its responsibilities and the boundaries of its authority. Team members should also have a clear sense of the team concept and what it means in terms of better executing and improving their processes. Team members will

continue to work on their particular tasks with the added skills that come from teamwork and process management training.

- **Too Much Too Soon.** This is related to unrealistic expectations. When a company begins a transition to teams, early on, members may want to do more than they are actually capable of. They learn about advanced teams taking charge of a whole range of activities including hiring, purchasing, and other duties. They may want to take these on before they have the skills and insight to perform them well. This naturally leads to frustration, disappointment and the erosion of the team.

Solution: Make sure teams understand why and how cross functional teams function and provide the training in a sequence that will lead them along at the right pace. Increasing team member skills and responsibilities will match up with one another.

- **Too Occupied With Work To Talk.** Team members may feel that meetings and any other unnecessary communications will get in the way of their performance. Members start to blame each other when things don't go as expected.

Solution: Emphasize at least one weekly team meeting as well as open communication and cooperative problem solving. Meetings let everyone know what's going on, what they need to do and how their work affects that of other team members. The cooperation, communication and intelligent application of process management tools facilitated by meetings will make it easier for team members to reach their goals with fewer problems.

Team Challenges Caused from Outside the Team:

Challenges to a successful team effort can also come from sources outside the team. They include old stereotypes among stakeholders, competition between departments and key people, and a lack of interest or information sharing among those parties about each other.

Solution: To overcome outside obstacles and build effective relationships with stakeholders, team members should (Capezio, 1998):

- Identify key stakeholders; those who can help and those who can create obstacles,
- Look for commonalities with stakeholders,
- Communicate information about their team, and learn about other teams,
- Select informal “boundary manager” from team members skilled in handling the flow of information and resources,
- Identify potential barriers and ways to overcome them,
- Be credible in all that they say and do.

Conclusions

The most important thing management and teams can do to solve problems is to take actions that prevent many of them from occurring the first place. In reviewing the different types of problems covered, we find that many of them come from management or from team members not properly understanding what instituting teams and being on a team really involves.

Neither managers, nor team members can anticipate all the problems that might get in the way of a team succeeding. When problems arise, such as interpersonal or other types of conflicts or any of hundreds of everyday process problems, the teams that succeed face these head on, collect data, and use an agreed-on problem-solving approach to solve them. It's really not the problems that undermine team performance, but either the inability or lack of desire to deal with them.

Team leadership, team culture, team attitude and team training are vital components of team success, especially when teams are just getting started. With an understanding of why teams make sense and how they evolve and an open-eyed view of what's required to participate as a team member, it's far more likely they will succeed. Additionally, communication, good interpersonal relations, and effective ways of dealing with conflict are also important if team members are to cooperate in a productive manner.

Chapter III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

In its evolution to a team culture, the Individual Insurance Department established a Project Management Standards Committee to emphasize and support the organization's commitment to managing team initiatives in a cross functional culture. The standards were introduced in January, 1999 via the Intranet as a self-study management course, rather than a mandatory management organizational requirement.

While establishing standards was a noteworthy accomplishment, the committee quietly disbanded due to budget cuts. The standards are not being used or monitored for uniform application, and team member issues such as selection, responsibilities, rewards and training remain open to this day.

As a result of the "optional" standard and a culture entrenched in a traditional hierarchial structure, individual team member and team leadership behaviors, combined with existing division silos, proved to be less than efficient and led to significant morale problems among the staff. In fact, in 2001, nearly 53% of cross functional team initiatives failed to either achieve results in the allotted time or within budget. And those that did declare victory "limped" across the finish line, with team members swearing never to work on another team again.

Description of Survey

Senior leadership in the Individual Insurance Department commissioned this study and survey to gather first-hand feedback of employee perceptions on the organization's transition to a cross functional team-oriented culture. According to department leadership, this transformation officially began in 1999. The survey is considered an interim benchmarking step in assessing the workplace environment. The results will serve as a

catalyst in identifying key areas that require continued emphasis and more targeted measurements, as the department moves forward.

The goal of the survey was to gain feedback from recent and active team members in order to receive a quantitative response that would be relevant to this study. Section I of the survey was designed to capture some general information about each participant to ensure we gain a perspective and assess data, by varying cross sections, from all levels of our cross functional team respondents. Section II consists of 12 statements that were measured on the basis of the Likert scale: a survey system utilizing a five-point scale. The rating scale statements ranged from "SA" meaning that the individual strongly agrees with the statement, "A" agrees with the statement, "N" takes a neutral stand with the statement, "D" disagrees with the statement, or "SD" profoundly disagrees with the statement. In reviewing the 12 statements, the author explores employee perceptions pertaining to workplace culture, leadership, and overall team member needs and experiences (see Appendix A).

All questions require the participant to simply mark the single response that best describes his feelings. Results were independently collected and tabulated to ensure confidentiality. The participants completed the survey on Tuesday, November 4, 2003, while attending weekly division staff meetings.

Population and Sample

For this study managers from seven divisions within the Individual Insurance Department selected a sampling of 120 employees representing Compliance, Legal, Sales, Marketing, Operations, Information Technology and Customer Service. Each of the participants had been identified as having participated on one or more cross functional team during 36 months period from June, 2000 to June, 2003. The reasoning behind these qualifications was to attain a qualified pool of individuals who have first-hand experience in the cross functional team setting in question.

As the organization has been reportedly transforming to a cross functional team culture, executive leadership is interested in benchmarking employee perception and experience while on a cross functional team. More importantly, senior leadership feels it has been making significant strides in transforming the culture and is interested in determining where more emphasis is needed.

Data Collection

Because of the targeted nature of this study, the survey sample was contained in one department which afforded the author the unique opportunity to have the survey conducted during the regular Tuesday morning staff meetings of each of seven divisions. This ensured the highest response rate possible. A total of 114 of the targeted survey group responded.

Each division manager provided the participants a cover letter, signed by the Department Senior Executive, a survey, and an envelope with the division name on it. Employees were asked to complete the survey during the time allotted at the staff meeting, seal their reply in the envelope and drop it in an express mail box in the meeting room, next to the complimentary food and beverages. All division managers made a point at the end of the meeting to seal the express mail box in the presence of the staff, and have a designated employee immediately take the box to the mail room for overnight shipment.

Results were entered into spreadsheets which were prepared for each data component of Section I and for each survey question in Section II. The author and a third party, in turn, validated all data entries against the original survey forms. Once completed, the author was able to sort the information by data field, survey question and Likert classification to achieve a cross section of respondent data and corresponding percentages to each question, from which to draw conclusions and formulate recommendations.

Chapter IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Due to the targeted nature of the survey, accessibility to the survey sample during weekly Tuesday morning staff meetings provided replies from 114 employees identified for the survey. As noted earlier, this sample was comprised of representatives from seven key areas. Charts 1.1 and 1.2 provide a profile of the survey sample respondents including functional division, level, gender, average years of service, team size, and full-time compared to part-time team member involvement.

Chart 1.1

Survey Sample Profile of Respondents					
	<u>Senior Executive</u>	<u>Vice President</u>	<u>Manager/ Supervisor</u>	<u>Non Management</u>	<u>Total Respondents</u>
Compliance	1	1	1	5	8
Legal	0	2	2	3	7
Sales	2	1	3	12	18
Marketing	1	1	3	13	18
Information Technology	1	2	5	12	20
New Business Processing	1	2	4	14	21
Customer Service	<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>22</u>
Total Respondents:	6	10	23	75	114
Male: 54% Female: 46% Average Years with Company: 11.6% Average Team Size: 28 Full-time Membership: 39% Part-time Membership: 61%					

Chart 1.2

Survey Sample By Race	
African American / Black:	19%
Asian / Pacific Islander:	11%
Hispanic / Latino:	21%
Caucasian / White:	53%
Other:	10%

The central focus of this research study was to define the characteristics of an effective cross functional team, and benchmark the perceptions among executive and non executive team members as the Individual Insurance Department evolves to a cross functional team culture.

Based on (1) the literature review, (2) the author's professional experience as a cross functional team leader on several large scale projects in the Individual Insurance Department from 1995 through 2000, and (3) first-hand validation of survey statements and responses by, and experiences of, three independent consultants who have worked on cross functional teams in the Individual Insurance Department during the 36 month survey period, the author had several expectations as to what the data would reveal.

The author's primary assumption was that since the discontinuance of the Project Management Standards Committee, the individual insurance department has slipped back into a traditional hierarchial top-down culture. Specifically, the author assumed that most team members were required to maintain their current responsibilities while a member of a team, and that results on survey statements concerning cross functional team culture, clarity of team mission, goals and objectives, measurements, and resources, would rank higher among senior executive and vice president ranks, and be rated lower among the manager / supervisor and non management ranks. Conversely, respondents rating lower on the organizational culture, would also report greater degrees of disagreement in award and

recognition, having adequate team resources, and be less interested and willing to participate on another team initiative.

In addition, having implemented no new standards supporting a team-oriented culture since the committee disbanded. due to budget cuts, contrary to the feelings of senior executives, the Individual Insurance Department has ceased driving toward a cross functional team culture. Many organizational management researchers (Helgesen, 1995; Henke et al., 1993; Hutt, Walker & Frankwick, 1995; Parker, 1994, Proehl, 1996) have confirmed that regardless of organizational flattening or reengineering efforts, you cannot superimpose a cross functional team on a hierarchy and expect it to work effectively.

The author's assumptions were also formulated by the 2001 Individual Insurance Department assessment where nearly 53% of cross functional team initiatives failed to either achieve results in the allotted time or within budget. In addition, issues that were of primary concern when the author managed cross functional teams in this department, such as, team member selection, clarity of purpose, resource allotment, training and rewards, have remained unresolved. Yet, cross functional teams continue to be formed.

Data Review

In assembling the data and reviewing the statements the author evaluates the five categories of a successful cross function team including organizational culture (Statements 1 to 4), clarity of purpose (Statements 5 and 6), team resources (Statements 7 and 8), rewards and recognition (Statements 9 and 10), and overall team experience (Statements 11 and 12). For organizational perspective at differing job levels, the author has noted where results differ between groups within the survey sample. As noted below, the entire survey sample of 114 respondents was included in results for all statements, except Statements 9 and 12, which require a more personal reply from team members. Consultants were asked to reply to the statements in the survey and on the results as provided by respondents, during the author's evaluative phase of the data.

Organizational Culture:

Statement 1: Senior management demonstrates its support for the team goals and objectives.

For this statement 16 respondents (14 percent) strongly agreed that senior management demonstrated support for team goals and objectives. This group consisted of all senior executives and most vice presidents in the survey sample. Thirty-one respondents (27 percent) agreed with the statement, while 55 respondents (48 percent) took a neutral position regarding senior management's demonstrated support. Twelve respondents (11 percent) disagreed with this statement. Zero respondents strongly disagreed.

Since the majority (75 percent) of the surveyed group either agreed or were neutral with the statement, it can be inferred that that while senior management announces the formation of a cross functional team and its mission within the department at its onset, the effectiveness of "demonstrated" support beyond the announcement is not readily apparent to most team members.

Statement 2: The Company culture, vision and values support teamwork and empowerment.

Six respondents (5 percent) strongly agreed with this statement. Of this group all were senior executives. Sixteen respondents (14 percent) agreed with this statement. All Vice Presidents were included in this group. Nine respondents (8 percent) were neutral. Sixty-two respondents (54 percent) disagreed that the Company culture, vision and values support teamwork and empowerment. Twenty-one respondents (18 percent) strongly disagreed with the statement.

The majority of respondents (73 percent) either disagreed or strongly disagreed that the Company culture, vision and values support teamwork and empowerment. Under the circumstances, it can be inferred that thus far the department's efforts have yet to achieve clear recognition, or to permeate the workplace through a "walk your talk" experience among those assigned to cross functional teams.

Statement 3: I can see a clear link between the team assignment and the Company's mission.

Ten respondents (9 percent) strongly agreed with this statement. All of the senior executives were included in result. Thirty respondents (26 percent) agreed with this statement, while 19 respondents (17 percent) were neutral. Forty-eight respondents (42 percent) disagreed that there was a clear link between team assignment and the Company's mission. Seven respondents (6 percent) strongly disagreed with this statement.

Nearly half (48 percent) of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, reflecting a lack of clarity among team members in regard to team purpose and a clear understanding of its linkage to overall Company mission.

Statement 4: Sufficient effort is made to get the opinions of team members in the decision making process.

Three respondents (3 percent) strongly agreed with this statement. Twenty-three respondents (20 percent) agreed, with 18 respondents (16 percent) neutral. Sixty-two respondents (54 percent) disagreed that sufficient effort is made to get opinions of team members in the decision making process. Eight respondents (7 percent) strongly disagreed that sufficient effort is made to get the opinions of team members in the decision making process.

The decision making process in a cross functional team setting is critical. A majority of respondents disagree with the existing, or perhaps lack of, a meaningful inclusive team decision making process.

Clarity of Purpose:

Statement 5: Leadership clearly articulated the team mission, goals and objectives.

Six respondents (5 percent) strongly agreed with this statement, while 21 respondents (18 percent) agreed. Forty-seven respondents (41 percent) were neutral and 40 respondents

(35 percent) disagreed that leadership clearly articulated the team mission, goals and objectives. Zero respondents strongly disagreed with this statement.

Clarity of purpose is a critical cross functional team dynamic. A majority of respondents neutral on this statement infers uncertainty of purpose either at the at the onset of the team, or in a change of team direction and an outcome that may differ from the original mission.

Statement 6: The team had clearly articulated performance measurements.

Zero respondents strongly agreed with this statement, while thirteen respondents (11 percent) agreed with this statement. Twenty-one respondents (18 percent) were neutral. A clear majority of 69 respondents (61 percent) disagreed that their team had clearly articulated performance measurements. Eleven respondents (10 percent) strongly disagreed with this statement.

An understanding of team purpose is among the top five critical elements in effective cross functional teams. Having a majority of respondents disagree with this statement, once again, reflects a lack of clarity among team members and an organization that has yet to achieve a cross functional team culture where accountabilities and key measurements are understood by all.

Resources:

Statement 7: My team had the resources (personnel, budget, tools, computers, etc.) necessary to accomplish its goals and objectives.

Zero respondents strongly agreed with this statement, while 8 respondents (7 percent) agreed. Thirty-two respondents (28 percent) were neutral. A majority of 63 respondents (55 percent) disagreed that their team had the resources necessary to accomplish its goals and objectives. Eleven respondents (10 percent) strongly disagreed with this statement.

The majority of respondents (65 percent) either disagree or strongly disagree that their team had the resources necessary to accomplish its goals and objectives. This data appears to support the 53% of teams in 2001 that failed to achieve results within the allotted time or within budget.

Statement 8: Management is investing in training for employees in its move to a cross functional team culture.

Three respondents (3 percent) strongly agreed with this statement, with 23 respondents (20 percent) agreed. Collectively, this group of respondents included all senior executive and vice president respondents surveyed. Fifty-seven respondents (50 percent) were neutral and 31 respondents (27 percent) disagreed that management is investing in training for employees in its move to a cross functional team culture. Zero respondents strongly disagreed with this statement.

This finding reflects a disjoint within the department on the purpose of the employee training being provided. With all of the senior executive and vice president respondents either strongly agreeing or agreeing with this statement, and a majority (77 percent) of remaining respondents neutral or disagreeing with the statement, clearly the purpose and intent and, in particular, the significance of training thus far in transforming the department to a cross functional team culture is being missed by the team members for whom it is intended.

Rewards and Recognition:

Statement 9: The reward and recognition system related to my contributions to the team is fair and reasonable.

Due to the personal application of this statement to the employee, in evaluating the results the author chose not to include senior executive and vice president respondents. Of the remaining 108 employees surveyed, zero respondents strongly agreed with this statement, while 5 respondents (5 percent) agreed. Fourteen respondents (13 percent) were neutral. A

majority of 73 respondents (68 percent) disagreed that “the reward and recognition system related to my contributions to the team is fair and reasonable.” Sixteen respondents (15 percent) strongly disagreed with this statement.

Rewards and recognition are among the top five critical success factors in team effectiveness. With a majority of respondents (82 percent) either disagreeing or strongly disagreeing, this clearly signifies a key area of development in the department’s efforts to build a team-oriented culture. This dynamic goes a long way to establishing "buy-in" by employees on a team. Team member morale and quality of output are compromised, and team membership feels "thankless". Other factors such as the high percent of team members who are part-time, with responsibility for their current assignment while on a team, contribute to the vagueness of how team members are evaluated for their team involvement and ultimately where their priorities should lie.

Statement 10: Team members are rewarded according to the teams overall performance.

Six respondents (5 percent) strongly agreed with this statement, while 5 respondents (4 percent) agreed. Sixteen respondents (14 percent) were neutral. A majority of 71 respondents (62 percent) disagreed that team members are rewarded according to the teams overall performance. Sixteen respondents (14 percent) strongly disagreed.

Not surprisingly, these results reflect a similar pattern of disagreement to those expressed in Statement 9. A majority (76 percent) of respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed on a team member reward system statement. Collectively with Statement 9, the data infers that the majority of team members do not feel rewarded or recognized either for their individual efforts or overall team performance.

Overall Team Experience:

Statement 11: For the most part, I am satisfied with the overall team experience.

Ten respondents (9 percent) strongly agree with this statement, while 19 respondents (17 percent) agree. Collectively, this group of respondents included all senior executive and vice president respondents surveyed. Fifty-five respondents (48 percent) were neutral in their overall satisfaction with their team experience. Seventeen respondents (13 percent) disagreed with this statement, while 13 respondents (11 percent) strongly disagreed.

In the current workplace, a majority of respondents neutral with this statement infers team members settling for the status quo, in the absence of having a meaningful and effective cross functional team setting to which to compare.

Statement 12: I am interested and willing to participate on another cross functional team initiative.

Due to the personal application of this statement to the employee, in evaluating the results the author chose not to include senior executive and vice president respondents. Of the remaining 108 employees surveyed, zero respondents strongly agreed with this statement, while 10 respondents (9 percent) agreed. Thirty-two respondents (30 percent) were neutral. Forty-eight respondents (44 percent) disagreed with being interested and willing to participate on another cross functional team initiative. Eighteen respondents (17 percent) strongly disagreed with this statement.

A majority (58 percent) of respondents disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this statement infers cross functional team initiatives in the current workplace holds little value. "Welcome to the team" is viewed as an added burden rather than an exciting opportunity for personal and professional growth and development.

Chapter V

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

At the onset of this research study, the author sought to explore the key characteristics of successful cross functional team dynamics and to benchmark team participant perceptions based on their experiences in the evolving organizational structure. Through a comprehensive review of relevant literature related to cross functional teams and the creation and implementation of the cross functional team survey questionnaire, the author discovered the barriers and pitfalls, as well as, the critical roles the organizational culture, team leaders and team members have in creating and successfully maintaining effective cross functional team dynamics.

A cross functional team exists when its members begin thinking like a team. The time it takes to build this consensus among team members varies. It depends on the complexity and scope of the initiative, the culture that the team members are working within and the amount of trust the individuals already feel. It also requires upgrading leadership and team member skills, and, finally, that organizational culture become more interactive and less bureaucratic.

The author agrees with Parker (1996), Katzenback and Smith (1993) and Henke, et al. (1993) that the critical link for all parties in a cross functional team setting lies in recognizing, understanding and embracing the interdependence of the functions and people who have a stake in the overall success of an initiative. "The sum is greater than the parts".

In a cross functional team-based culture, money, effort and, most important, patience and support are invested eagerly. There is strong recognition that operating as a team is different from what we are used to from our experiences at school and at home and that, in order to be successful, we need to learn how to play by new rules. But to achieve this ideal, the members of a team must have a common objective, clear roles and goals, the resources

needed to work productively, and the character and loyalty to see an initiative through to completion.

Clearly, when it comes to organizational responsibilities in a cross functional team culture, the author does not wish to suggest that teams represent a "one size, fits all" solution to organizational problem-solving. In fact, the author agrees with Maccoby (1999) that companies changing to a team culture often experience "team mania" creating teams for every challenge, and overwhelming employees with team involvement for every task.

Nonetheless, as the literature reveals and the organization in question demands, there are many strategic and practical benefits to implementing a cross functional team in support of a vast majority of initiatives. The literature cites and the author agrees with Sanders and Pascale (1999) that organization leadership has critical responsibilities which include developing:

- competent and lean functional knowledge groups in which experts share their specialized knowledge, and have their competencies aligned with strategic goals,
- processes for forming, managing and assessing a clearly understood mandate, functional requirements and timelines, guidelines for training new team members,
- performance rewards and recognition guidelines that balance team success, while recognizing individual contribution,
- cultural operating principles and norms that are understood, embraced and practiced by everyone,
- an interactive, transparent, informational free-flowing organizational hierarchy, including the strategic level, the operational and functional knowledge level, and the "doing" level of technical staff.

The author further agrees with the literature review that team leaders also play a crucial role. They must have the technical background to understand the subject of their teams' work, and to recognize the potential contributions of people from a wide variety of backgrounds. They must also have the people management skills to facilitate group

interaction, especially among people with little experience or, even worse, bad experience in working with others. Additional responsibilities include:

- the know-how to help the team establish a mission and set goals,
- the knowledge and assertiveness to obtain the necessary resources,
- an ability to work with little, no, or unclear authority,
- a willingness and the relevant skills to develop and manage ongoing relationships with key stakeholders outside the team,
- a willingness to adapt as conditions change and the needs of the team evolve.

Finally, team members are responsible for actively contributing cross functional team capabilities such as:

- understanding what the organization is out to accomplish in the next 3 to 5 years,
- a solid grounding in their own functional disciplines,
- respect for the contribution of each function,
- accepting clear mandates to make decisions,
- team-oriented competencies such as listening, speaking, dialog, feedback, group goal setting, meeting behaviors and conflict resolution,
- the proper character of the individual team member.

Both the literature and data confirmed the author's primary assumption that there is a serious need for organizational and team leadership, and team members to more clearly understand and embrace the interdependence of each and every function involved with an initiative. With the exception of the reward and recognition statements, senior executive and vice president respondents had a much more optimistic view of the organizational culture, clarity of purpose, team resources and overall experience statements than the remaining non-executive survey respondents.

Data suggests that, overall, messages from leadership are being delivered and some degree of training is being recognized by team members. Yet there is a clear indication that the subject, frequency and type of activity, on the part of team leadership, is not helping team

members understand the team mission, its relationship to the company, the value and importance of the functional interdependence, and individual team member roles and responsibilities in contributing to team success.

This challenge acknowledges action being taken, but leaves a gap in translating the action into a meaningful experience for team members. It is also important to remember that those responding to this survey are currently experiencing a hybrid cross functional team dynamic within a more traditional top down hierarchical culture. They have yet to experience the full team dynamic in a cross functional culture.

Both the literature review and data also expose the adverse impact that a lack of reward and recognition, empowerment in decision making and adequate team resources have on team member experiences and ongoing attitudes. This trend is a fundamental weakness on cross functional teams operating in a traditional hierarchial organizational structure. The obvious frustration contributes to a lack of enthusiasm and a complacency in a team member's willingness and interest to participate on another cross function team.

Executives, team leaders and team members are at different levels of readiness for change. It is critical that top management whole-heartedly commit to implementing the team concept throughout the organization. Successful implementation of the cross functional team concept requires: (a) establishing a clear definition of the cross functional team approach, (b) allocating sufficient monetary and time resources, (c) improving communications across teams and functional divisions, (d) demonstrating (through managerial behaviors) tangible support for verbal commitment, and (e) encouraging willingness, on the part of team leaders, to let go of decision making and, on the part of team members, to accept increased responsibility.

Future Study

In closing, the author believes that the literature review and data contribute to a growing body of information which can serve as primary areas of focus in future study related to the Individual Insurance Department evolution to a cross functional team culture.

The author recommends that training and development specialists utilize these findings to further isolate the primary team behaviors vital to cross functional team dynamics, and create meaningful soft skill training curriculums for all levels of the organization. The goal here is to achieve team oriented skills that will not only improve individual performance, but contribute to the overall cross functional team success. Key areas of focus should include:

- Cultural operating principles and norms that are understood, embraced and practiced by everyone. Communicating, developing and reinforcing these principles through training at all levels of the organization is critical.
- Performance rewards and recognition guidelines that balance team success and individual contribution. Managers should be required to incorporate feedback from employees' team leaders. Individual rewards should acknowledge people who are effective team players; people who freely share their expertise, pitch in and help out when needed, effectively facilitate meetings, and challenge teams to improve. And teams should be appointed a compensation factor in which to measure overall team success.
- A values-based learning culture. Cross functional teams require a customer driven focus supported by value-based principles to always do what is best for the customer, rather than a management driven focus supported by outdated policies and procedures designed to benefit the company first.
- Team-oriented competencies such as listening, speaking, dialog, feedback, group goal setting, meeting behaviors and conflict resolution. The team should be trained to practice these skills. Team effectiveness depends on individual character, as well as, skills, leadership and organizational capability.

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(APPENDIX A)
Individual Insurance Department
Cross Functional Teams Survey Questionnaire
(November 4, 2003)

I. Background Data

A. Please indicate your primary job function from the choices listed below.

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Compliance | <input type="checkbox"/> Legal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sales | <input type="checkbox"/> Marketing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Operations: New Business Processing | <input type="checkbox"/> Customer Service |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Systems: Information Technology | |

B. Please select the category which best corresponds to your job level.

- All levels below Associate Manager
 Associate Manager through Director
 Vice President
 Senior Executive

C. Gender: Male Female

D. Race: African American/Black Hispanic
 Asian/Pacific Islander White/Caucasian
 Other

E. How long have you worked for the Company?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Less than a year | <input type="checkbox"/> At least 5 but less than 10 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> At least 1 but less than 3 years | <input type="checkbox"/> At least 10 but less than 20 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> At least 3 but less than 5 years | <input type="checkbox"/> 20 or more years |

F. During the past 36 months on how many cross functional teams did you participate as a full time member (i.e.; removed from full time duties of current assignment)?

- One to two teams Three to five teams More than five teams

G. During the past 36 months on how many cross functional teams did you participate as a part-time member (i.e.; continued to assume duties of full time assignment while on the team)?

- One to two teams Three to five teams More than five teams

H. Approximately how many full time team members were on your cross functional team(s).

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3 to 5 members | <input type="checkbox"/> 6 to 10 members |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 11 to 15 members | <input type="checkbox"/> 16 to 20 members |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 21 to 25 members | <input type="checkbox"/> Greater than 26 members |

I. Who participated on the team? Please check all that apply.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-management | <input type="checkbox"/> Management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vice President | <input type="checkbox"/> Executive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Outside Vendor | <input type="checkbox"/> Outside Consultant |

**Individual Insurance Department
Cross Functional Teams Survey Questionnaire**

II. TEAM MEMBER FEEDBACK

Based on the scale below, please circle the answer that most closely represents your opinion to each of the 12 statements.

SA – Strongly Agree A – Agree N – Neutral D – Disagree SD – Strongly Disagree

For the most part, I am satisfied with the overall team experience.	SA	A	N	D	SD
I can see a clear link between the team assignment and the Company's mission.	SA	A	N	D	SD
The reward and recognition system related to my contributions to the team are fair and reasonable.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Team members are rewarded according to the teams overall performance.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Senior management demonstrates its support for the team goals and objectives.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Sufficient effort is made to get the opinions of team members in the decision making process.	SA	A	N	D	SD
My team had the resources (personnel, budget, tools, computers, etc.) necessary to accomplish its goals and objectives.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Leadership clearly articulated the team mission, goals and objectives.	SA	A	N	D	SD
The team had clearly articulated performance measures.	SA	A	N	D	SD
I am interested and willing to participate on another cross functional team initiative.	SA	A	N	D	SD
The Company culture, vision and values support teamwork and empowerment.	SA	A	N	D	SD
Management is investing in training for employees in the organization's move to a cross functional team culture.	SA	A	N	D	SD