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Time Efficient Team Building

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Abstract

Team building requires the knowledge of available tools to accomplish the tasks at hand while working in time constraints of school districts. This article reviews: a) effective team building strategies, b) applies team building to develop new knowledge, and c) makes use of total quality management tools to build teams in a limited time frame.

Preface

The superintendent sat and stared at the school district long range-planning document on her desk. It had been five years since the board of education had approved the plan, and it was now her responsibility to review and update the document. The superintendent had mixed emotions about her impending task. She knew long range planning was important to produce efficient district goals and objectives, but felt the last time the plan was developed it did not adequately reflect the everyday challenges of the teachers, staff, students, and parents in her school district.

It was obvious to the superintendent that a strong team-building plan that included everyone in her school district was the answer to her problem. However, the question of how to work as a team to do long range planning while working with the time constraints of teachers and parents was difficult. How could the district reap the benefits of good teamwork to develop goals and objectives, but not be too intrusive on the personal lives and obligations of staff and parents?

Introduction

The performance of any school district depends on a strong set of goals and objectives. “When a work group has at least one goal that is common to all members and when accomplishment of that goal requires cooperative interdependent behavior on the part of all group members, team building may be an appropriate intervention” (Burke,

1988, p.3). The development of school district goals and objectives through long range planning is an excellent opportunity for school administrators to make use of team building.

Team building is a task that does not come easily to all people. School administrators struggle with finding time to develop efficient team building strategies. Team building requires the knowledge of available tools to help alleviate common pressures that come with the tasks at hand. This article reviews: a) effective team building strategies, b) applying team building to develop new knowledge, and c) efficient use of limited time through use of TQM (total quality management) tools.

Team Building

In today's schools, interdependence of educators is becoming more common. Goal setting is a top priority in educational institutions. For goals to be accomplished in the most efficient way, one goal must be defined as the primary goal or there tends to be a misuse of energy (Burke, 1988). Team building is a way to control the direction and energy of the task at hand. Team building is a process of building appropriate working relationships among the members of the organization to address an issue.

Creation of New Knowledge

According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), continuous innovation is enhanced by making use of the interdependence of those within the organization. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) contend "Knowledge that is accumulated from the outside is shared widely within the organization, stored as part of the company's knowledge base, and utilized by those engaged in developing new technologies and products" (p. 6). The process of shifting knowledge from the outside to the inside, or inside to the outside, is called knowledge conversion (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Knowledge conversion deals with two types of knowledge, explicit and tacit. Explicit knowledge is formal and systematic. Words or numbers can easily communicate explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge deals with insights and intuitions, and is formulated from an individual's experience and previous actions. Tacit knowledge is not easily visible or expressible.

Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) explained that the conversion process between tacit and explicit knowledge occurs in four modes: a) socialization, b) externalization, c) combination, and d) internalization. Described below is the relevance of each mode in school district team building. The description of each mode identifies TQM activities that provide time efficient team building strategies for administrators to use with their staff.

Socialization

To begin the complex process of team building, the first mode of knowledge conversion is socialization (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). During the socialization process, team members share experiences and create a common language all members can

understand (Nonaka & Takeuchi). Before goals and priorities can be set in the group, socialization should be accomplished. An example of socialization in school districts is long range planning by patrons, business leaders, and students as well as all levels of employees. The team is brought together to share ideas and experiences as they are trying to formulate long-range goals.

Socialization can be accomplished by applying a variety of TQM techniques. Brainstorming is a simple yet common tool used in teamwork. During brainstorming team members think of any and all possible solutions. By involving everyone in brainstorming a large volume of ideas will be created (Brassard & Ritter, 1994). Brainstorming creates a situation in which participants are able to contribute free of criticism. Brainstorming helps to include all team members and creative thinking is encouraged when the team is stuck in a daily regimented way of thinking (Brassard & Ritter).

Another helpful TQM tool that could be used during this phase is called activity networking. Activity networking gives all group members the opportunity to view and discuss a process based on actual experiences, which in turn allows other group members to see all the views of each individual teammate (Brassard & Ritter, 1994). An activity network begins by noting all the tasks in written form. Each task is then prioritized and the team must decide if more than one of the tasks can be done at the same time. A path of importance will generate from this tool (Brassard & Ritter).

At this stage, interdependence is critical. Each member must feel ownership for the process to continue successfully.

Externalization

The second phase described by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) is externalization. Nonaka and Takeuchi define externalization as the ability to convert tacit knowledge (shared ideas) into explicit knowledge (concrete knowledge). It is important tacit knowledge be turned into usable explicit knowledge. Team members make use of meaningful dialog by sharing metaphors, analogies, concepts, hypothesis, and models. At the externalization stage of the goal setting process, brainstorming ideas from the long-range goal setting district team are converted into concrete ideas. A method of transferring tacit knowledge to explicit knowledge might be accomplished by organizing ideas and experiences by individual team members into categories. The key to knowledge conversion in this mode is transforming knowledge into concepts. Affinity diagrams and prioritization matrices are effective TQM tools during this mode of conversion.

The long range planning team now should categorize the ideas generated through brainstorming. Affinity diagrams provide the method for this categorization and allow member's ideas to become concrete knowledge (Brassard & Ritter, 1994). Affinity diagrams encourage ideas to connect in a non-traditional manner and allow ownership by

members of the team (Brassard & Ritter). Ideas emerge in a way that is natural and helps eliminate stale issues.

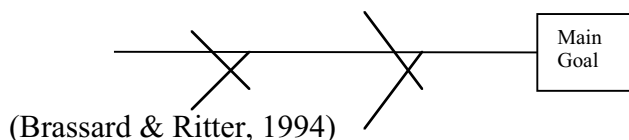
Prioritization matrices allow disagreements to surface quickly and to be resolved openly. This tool helps to narrow the options and forces the team to select and compare the knowledge and concepts (Brassard & Ritter, 1994). After consensus on the overall goal is reached, criteria are placed on a matrix to help visualize what takes priority. All options are compared and the optimal option is chosen (Brassard & Ritter).

Combination

According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) the third phase of knowledge conversion complex process is called combination. During this stage, explicit knowledge is converted into new and additional forms of explicit knowledge. Mid-range concepts are combined and integrated into grand concepts. As archetypes (models) are built, sharing of knowledge across the organization takes place. Concepts are justified against goals and priorities (Nonaka & Takeuchi). At this point, a school district goal setting team converts categories (mid-range concepts) into an overall plan for goals and objectives (archetype). To successfully accomplish this stage, TQM techniques such as fishboning and interrelationship digraphs could be used.

Fishbone diagrams (Figure 1) forces the team to focus on the content and causes of the problem, not symptoms (Brassard & Ritter, 1994). After the team sets the main goal, it is placed on the main “bone” of the fish. The smaller connecting bones are the causes and effects. Through this diagram a vision of issues surrounding the problem are accomplished (Brassard & Ritter).

Figure 1
Fishbone Diagram



In interrelationship digraphing, key drivers and key outcomes are identified by the team and categorized by the effect they have on each other (Brassard & Ritter, 1994). Interrelationship digraphing forces team members to view relationships of the knowledge they have created. This process also enhances the team’s ability to think in multiple directions. Interrelationship digraphing classifies “the cause and effect relationships that exist among all critical issues so that key drivers and outcomes can become the heart of an effective solution” (Brassard & Ritter, 1994, p.76).

During this complex third phase, all team members should have equal influence to promote the best growth for the team (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). Team growth must continue throughout the process.

Internalization

The fourth and final phase of knowledge conversion is called internalization (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). During this phase explicit knowledge is turned back into tacit knowledge. Although this appears to be an easy task, it is arguably one of the most difficult phases. Team members begin to internalize new explicit knowledge that broadens and reframes their own tacit knowledge. The district goal setting team is ready to publish and defend newly formed goals. Goals become internalized by team members, staff, students, and others in the community.

A flow chart is a visual TQM tool that can help to accomplish conversion. A flow chart identifies the actual sequence of events needed to complete the process under study. It will also compare the actual flow of knowledge with the idea (Brassard & Ritter, 1994).

Internalization, as well as the other three modes, encourages spiraling throughout the organization. The spiral constitutes the four modes circling around each other and justifies concepts created at other stages.

Summary

School district long range goal planning can be accomplished by use of team building processes. Team building is a method to create new knowledge and control the direction of the group. Team building allows individuals to share knowledge and a combination of ideas. Four phases (socialization, externalization, combination and internalization) were identified in which knowledge is created. TQM methods were suggested at each phase as a way to increase efficiency. It is important to remember that although these phases seem to occur in chronological order, teams can flow back-and-forth from mode to mode in a spiral fashion.

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