CHAPTER III : TEAMWORK - THE FOUNDATION OF TBC

. ELEMENTS OF TEAMWORK

A team is defined as a group of individuals who come together to contribute their efforts in performing a certain task in a cooperative manner. Team members are enthusiastic, supportive of one another, working and harmonising with each other to reach a common goal. They work well together and enjoy doing so in order to produce high quality results. Teams may be formed at various levels. There are two types of teams which are easily identifiable, the first is the organisation as a whole while the second is the smaller sized task team. The latter is also more specific, comprising a small group of individuals who have come together to do a job in a combined effort (Michael, A. 1993).

A manager's task is essentially to organise a group of individuals in union to achieve a common goal. His performance is measured by how well he gets each team member to render the optimum and blend his efforts with the other team members into a coordinated whole. This challenge is faced at every level in an organisation; from the lowest level to the highest executive level. Only a united team effort can bring excellence and productivity to an organisation. Organisations have found that integrating the efforts of its employees requires a great deal of planning, effort and hardwork. An effort towards promoting a corporate culture which emphasises teamwork is a conscious attempt to move people in the same direction so that everyone in the company shares the same vision. Frequently, the chairman of an organistion in his speech will emphasise on the importance of teamwork in achieving goals. Shared work rituals also help employees translate this message into action. But an organisation's values may not be accepted by all employees who are from different ethnic origins. Hence, the task of building a strong and effective workforce out of the multi-ethnic employees found in most Malaysian companies can be very challenging.

When working in teams, there is an overt expression of willingness, spontaneity and voluntariness among members to help and cover for one another when necessary. Individualistic behaviour, often expressed in the unwillingness of an individual to perform a job that is not his direct responsibility, is considered as disruptive and often downplayed. Such individuals would consider working in a team nebulous, since an individual is not given the credit for completing the task successfully on his own. Instead the credit goes to all individuals in the group and only members who understand clearly the superordinate goal would be willing to work to achieve the agreed objectives.

A multi-cultural work team can be nutured by integrating the different aspirations and values upheld by its members. The diversity in its membership can be an asset in generating alternatives that are both varied and creative. Hence based on the concept of synergy - where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts - a multi-cultural work team can develop into a hybrid team, where members have a sense of achievement, affiliation and belonging. Harmony and rapport prevail, ideas and feelings are shared and the task gets done in an environment of mutual trust, respect and candour. The challenge for most Malaysian managers is therefore to extract the common values of members from different ethnic groups (Bumiputras, Chinese, Indians and Others) and even people from differing cultures (Western,Islamic or Chinese-educated, urban or rural), to surface at the workplace in the form of shared practices (Asma Abdullah et.al 1992).

2. CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH PERFORMANCE TEAM

A high performance multi-cultural work team will invariably blend social values with work dimensions. Members feel good about working together to achieve set targets. Among the characteristics of a high performance and multi-cultural work team in Malaysia are:-

o Loyalty And Pride of a Team

   Malaysians value team spirit highly. However, effort is required in building a high performance team. The management is responsible for establishing an environment conducive to group pride, and striving towards the common goal of the team. The team members are prepared to work beyond the call of duty. It is the motivation to be part of the group, to give loyalty and commitment to the leader and the task in hand, that enables the team to 'come' together. More important, it is the willingness and the spirit of 'give and take' that enables members to contribute their best efforts in order to accomplish the objective of the team.

o Harmony

Malaysians value harmony in work and in social relationships. The value of harmony can be traced back to the collectivistic nature of most Asian societies. Harmony is deeply rooted in the older societies of the Chinese, Japanese and Indian cultures. The most well-known is Confucianism where the family unit is the ideal social unit and an individual feels an utmost gratification to his family that brought him into this world. The unit is further extended into the clan, group or society, making the individual almost non-existent with his larger unit. The feeling of 'we' is common in the Indian culture; and among the Malays is the spirit of 'gotong-royong' meaning 'joining forces in carrying out a task'.

o Family Feeling

Malaysians value family and family ties. The workplace is seen as a second home where members of the team have embodied the spirit of living together in harmony. There is a strong work bond resembling family ties. Hence separating formal work and informal relationships risks breaking the dynamics of a team.

o Cooperation

When a mistake is detected, it is quickly rectified without putting the blame on one another. Instead the whole group will work to overcome the problem. This is based on cooperation, trust and compatibility. The manager-cum-leader of the multi-cultural work team makes a conscious effort to promote an environment for enhancing these values. In recognising the importance of face-saving, team members often prefer not to see an individual singled out for blame, even though the blame may be justified.

o Indirect Communication

There is a tendency for Malaysians to be indirect when sloving a difficult issue relating to team members. In the attempt to use an indirect mode of communication the intent is often precluded by talking about a different issue and then carefully 'steering the discussion' to focus on the issue at hand. For example, a manager will start the conversation talking on general issues before touching on the poor performance of the team due to the 'uncooperative' behaviour of the subordinate. This approach is considered more palatable to the receiver because it comes across as less threatening, saves face and does not disrupt or threaten team spirit.

o   Avoiding Confrontation

Direct open confrontation is often avoided as maintaining harmonious relationship within the team is considered more important. The political system of the different ethnic groups is based upon an incremental approach, and to avoid raising any open criticism towards another group, marginal changes are made. If there is a need to voice out dissatifaction, a less overt approach is often used so that feelings and sensitivities are not hurt. It is critical that the team works smoothly without friction and all matters are handled amicably in a friendly and family-like manner.

DEVELOPING A TEAM

Emphasis on teamwork must come from the top, through all the management levels. If there is no drive toward team working, people will do their jobs as 'inividuals, or form their own team (with 'self interest' goals, that may conflict with company goals).

There are a number of actions a manager can take to develop a team. They apply equally to:

- creating a new team

- strengthening the performance of an existing team

* Planning Ahead

When we intend to set up a new team, or change the work of an existing team, always plan ahead. We have to consider the work that the team will do, and the capabilities of the people who will form the team, there may be a need for training, for example, so that people will have the necessary skills when the team starts to operate.

* Getting The Right People

  Take care that we have the right group of people, in terms
  of skills, attitudes and relationships, for a potentially
  successful team. If relationships between existing
  personnel are already soured, to the point of total
  breakdown, we may have to make some changes, to get a team
  nucleus of keen, open-minded people. Otherwise there is a
  risk that we will lose, before we even start.

* Putting Across Company Goals

  Make sure that people know what the company is trying to
  achieve, in terms of profitability, work quality,
  reputation and types of work. Company goals should take
  account of employee satisfaction and incentives, and place
  emphasis on team effort, and close working relations
  between groups that are interdependent.

*   Encouraging Communication

    Our communication down the line should be as full and
    frank as possible, to put everyone in the picture about
    the state of the company and its prospects. This
    openness sets a style for communication in the company.
    With a management team we can set up regular meetings to
    discuss performance, problems, ideas for improvements and
    developments.

*   Promoting Team Identity

    We should use every opportunity to emphasize team
    working and pride in team achievement. Help to develop
    team goals and standards: encourage 'the team' to
    examine critically the services it received, and its
    responsibilities for representing the company.

*   Encouraging Participation

    Delegate as much reponsibility as the team can take at
    each stage of development. Move more towards a 'team
    participation' style of leadership, encouraging the team
    to contribute to all decisions affecting team operations -
    establishing goals and standards, planning work
    methods and co-ordination with others.

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* Encouraging Self-Development

As people begin to work together as a team 'the team'
develops a momentum of its own, through the collective
drive to achieve and improve standards. This is a natural
process of self-development and we can sustain it,
encouraging team members to support each other by helping
individuals to overcome weakness.

* Strengthening The Team

If a team fails to come up to expectations, we may decide
to introduce into the team someone who can strengthen the
weaker aspects of team performance. If team
standards are low we can introduce a high performer in one
of the key posts. If the team lacks purpose or direction
we can introduce someone with leadership potential. Our
aim is to strengthen and raise the performance of the
whole team. But take great care over this approach,
tinkering with the make-up of a team can backfire badly if
the team gangs up on the newcomer and rejects him.

4. HANDLING TEAM CHANGES

When we lose a member of a team we want to replace him with someone who possesses the necessary skills to do the job. But we should also aim to choose a replacement who will fit into the team. This applies equally to the appointment of an experienced man or a trainee. The rest of the team may regard a change as a threat to the identity of the team, so it must be handled carefully.

These are things we can do to make the change as smooth as possible:

* Selecting With Care

Select a new member who will be:

- flexible enough to adapt to team goals and standards

- acceptable to the team, in terms of skill, attitude and personality

If the team is a very successful one, we may ask the team to help with selection, by advising us on the sort of person they want. If the team is not coming up to expectations we may use this opportunity to introduce someone who can strengthen and raise team performance.

* Putting The Newcomer In The Picture

At interview, and at the start of employment, emphasize that it is a job in a team. Spell out team goals and standards, working practices, and the team participation style of running things. Explore his background and attitude, to check that he can adapt to team requirements.

* Preparing The Team

Discuss the newcomer with the team, before he starts, describing his skills and experience. Appeal to the team to help him on his feet, and get them to see the appointment from the newcomer's point of view (a stranger coming into a close-knit group, uncertain about the reception he will get and having to change his thinking and work practices to some extent).

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* Arranging Induction And Initial Work

Plan the newcomer's induction to the company and to the team, and arrange his initial work programme. With a successful team, we will probably work through the team to draw up the plan and put it into practice.

* Monitoring Progress

Keep a close check during the 'setting in' period, reviewing progress with the newcomer and with the team (separately) at least once a week. If problems do occur encourage people to raise them with us, and act in a concilliation role. By the end of the second week we should have a pretty good idea about whether the change will succeed.

If we've got a good team and the change isn't working, it's best to pull the newcomer out, otherwise the team will take action itself, ganging up on him to get him to leave.

5. BENEFITS OF TEAMWORK

It should be emphasized here that, the benefits of teamwork can only be obtained if a successful team has been established. In this regard, this section list some benefits of a good team, working towards the organization's goals. By using the list as a check, the company or organization can ascertain whether it is getting each benefit from a particular team, as follows:

* Standards   The team works to common standards, and continuously aims to raise those standards.

* Motivation   The team has common values and goals, and each member is strongly motivated to achieve team goals.

* Collective   Together the members of the team
  Strength   have a collective strength and reliability, to the benefit of the company.

* Team   There is a free exchange of
  Communications   information between members.

* Strong Support — Team members are sensitive to each other's requirements, and support each other to achieve goals.

* Team Trust — There are good, relaxed working relationships within the team, and members have confidence and trust in each other.

* Team Stability — Labour turnover is relatively low, through members staying loyal to the team and the company.

* Team Initiative — The drive to achieve team goals stimulates initiative, with members seeking ways to improve work methods and co-ordination. This can go beyond the confines of team with members recommending improvement in the services they receive from others.

* Team Initiative — Individuals gain strength and stature through belonging to the team and contributing to team success.

* Company	While communications within the team are good, communications from the team are also good, in terms of requests for information and feedback from people providing services for the team, and information to people using the team's services.
* Company Influence	The team sets common standard, and also tries to influence other people (particularly people providing services for the team) to achieve these standards. If the team gets consistently poor services from other people it will try to put pressure on them to improve.
* Outside Influence	The team's influence extends to anyone with whom it has contact. They will 'join the team' (probably without realising it), and this results in co-operative, constructive relationships.

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All these plus points suggest there are benefits of good team work not only in team performance, but also in the effect the team has on other people, both in the company and outside.

The organization should check whether it is getting these benefits from each team, particularly management teams. If not, it means one of two things:

either   —   people are working as individuals rather than members of a team

or   —   people are working in a team, but team goal are in conflict wih company goals.

If the organization is not getting all these benefits it should consider ways to develop the team, effectively.