

Solution in Crisis Period - High Performance Team

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Abstract

Now, in this period characterized by serious financial crisis, with effects in all economy especially in the field of human resources, it requires that all businesses to gain a new perspective in the way to find new markets, new opportunities. The capacity of human resources manager to mobilize the creativity, energy and people's commitment can make the difference between survival or demise of a company.

During the crisis, companies reassess their resources and redefine their performance. Today the basic words have become: responsibility, flexibility, performance and competence.

In our opinion one of the solution for crisis is the strength of the team work. It's proven that in calm periods, the attitude of an individual in a group is a distant one, while when a threat come from outside the group, the individual becomes instinctively closer to the other members, and appear the need to consolidate the team.

Now, more than ever, people understand that the best that they can do is to be a team, to consider what can be build, strengthen and rebuild together.

This paper work presents that recalibration of the performances is based on the concept of high performance team like a solution for crisis period. We give the arguments that the strength of the team work will make the difference between the companies.

Keywords: *performance work teams, task roles, relationship roles, commitment, creative development*

JEL classification: J24

1 Roles of teams in organizations in crisis period

Now, in this period characterized by serious financial crisis, with effects in all economy especially in the field of human resources, it requires that all businesses to gain a new perspective in the way to find new markets, new opportunities. During the crisis, companies reassess their resources and redefine their performance. Today the basic words have become: responsibility, flexibility,

performance and competence. In our opinion one of the solution for crisis is the strength of the team work.

Numerous organizations have attributed their performance increase to team work concept. Out of many examples available we will mention but a few: the General Mills branches that became 40% more efficient than the ones functioning without teams, Federal Express that reduced service errors by 13%, the Carrier company that managed to reduce the production cycle from two weeks to two days or the Westinghouse Furniture Systems that increased its productivity by 74% within three years from the introduction of this concept.

Research¹ shows an increase of both organisational as well as individual efficacy for those companies actively using team work. Consequently, the values obtained exceed the average and involve, on the one hand, at management level: organisational processes and procedures being improved by 75%, a 60% technology implementation improvement, a 69% more efficient decision making process while, on the other hand, at an individual level significant increases have been noted with regard to the quality of products and services (70%), the quality of the work undertaken (63%), productivity (61%), work satisfaction (66%). Thus, the impact of team involvement creates a win-win situation for both the employees as well as for the organisation.

Today, in crisis period, building up an efficient team is a complex process that requires a set of absolutely necessary attributes for the members to be able to carry on the activity as well as possible.

During building up the team its members receive valuable feedback, learn how to get used to personality differences that might affect the team's performing, develop a common understanding of team's objectives and goals and design, for future actions, a plan that produces results on medium and long term.

In crisis period, team learning seems to have obvious effects compared to classic formulas, and this is because in most of the cases it values *dialogue* – to identify others' points of view, *reasoning* - to stand up for one's opinions and reach a conclusion, *evaluation* – to assess team's progress and *creativity* – to favour new ideas.

2 Building performance work teams

Whetten D. și Cameron K.² consider that team's performance may be positively influenced when its members play certain roles that facilitate task achievement and group's cohesion.

With them, work teams meet two great challenges: to achieve the appointed task, respectively to build unity and collaboration among team's members.

There are two major types of roles encouraging team performance: **task** facilitating **roles** and **relationship** building ones. It is difficult for the team

¹ Lawler E. E., "Mohrman S. A., Ledford G. E. -Creating high performance organizations: Practices and results of employee involvement and total quality" in: *Fortune 1000 companies*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1992.

² Whetten D., Cameron K.- *Developing management skills*, Prentice Hall, 2005, pg. 457

members to equally play both types of roles, most people tending to be more focused on only one field so that some concentrate more on tasks while others do it on relationships.

Task facilitating roles are those that help team work more efficiently in achieving its objectives, in meeting the desired results or goals.

Playing **task** facilitating **roles** means with the two authors:

- *Giving directions* – identify modalities or alternatives to pursue and clarify goals and objectives.
- *Looking for information* – ask questions, analyze the gaps in knowledge, ask for opinions, ideas, perspectives.
- *Providing with information* – provide with data, facts and reason and underline conclusions.
- *Elaborating* – build on the ideas expressed by others; give examples and illustrations.
- *Stimulating* – motivate team members stay task focused and achieve team's objectives.
- *Monitoring* – assess progress, develop measures to achieve success and help maintaining result monitoring.
- *Process analyzing* – assess processes and procedures used by team to improve performance and work time-table.
- *Testing facts* – explore whether presented ideas are practical or useful aligning the comments to facts.
- *Implementing* – help establish team rules, standards and maintain procedures agreed upon.
- *Concluding* – combine ideas and get together all team members' opinions, help members understand the reached conclusions.

These roles are important when team estranges from its task, when there is pressure, when the task is complex or ambiguous and the modality to proceed is not clear, or when the team encounters difficulties in fulfilling a task. In most of performance teams there are members who play these task facilitating roles.

High performance teams are also characterized by a strong interpersonal cohesion and a close collaboration among team members. This cohesion, interdependency generates a positive impact on team members.

Relationship building **roles** place accent on interpersonal aspects within team, favour a positive organizational climate, tensionfree, and orientate towards helping team members feel good with each other, work in team. These roles are important especially in the situations where tension manifests itself, where there is disagreement or team members do not contribute to team performance.

Among relationship building roles one may distinguish roles that imply:

- *Supporting* – stimulate team members by underlining each member's contribution to achieving the established objectives.

- *Harmonizing* – mediate differences among others, find a common element in the arguments and conflictual points of view.
- *Settling tensions* – manifest negotiation skills in order to lessen tension and reestablish the comfort necessary to team work.
- *Confronting* – deal with unproductive or destructive behaviour; help appropriate behaviour manifest within team.
- *Providing energy* – motivate others towards a higher effort, manifest enthusiasm.
- *Developing* – help others learn, orient and train team members.
- *Building consensus* – help building solidarity among team members, encourage agreement and consensus among them.
- *Showing empathy* – reflect the group's feelings and offer support to team members.

By means of these relationship building roles the group's chemistry is improved in a team. Relationship building roles are not designed to distract attention from the due tasks but help team work more efficiently together.

There is a certain magnetism and positive energy within a team.

Throughout relationship building roles team members tend to take more responsibility, collaborate better and try harder to find results agreed upon.

Since at some point some roles grow more dominant than others, teams becoming this way one dimensioned, performance at team level may be vitiated, teams reaching no important results. In order to dismiss this shortcoming a balance is needed between the two role categories: task oriented roles and relationship building ones.

Yet in most situations it is more probably that a team's members have unproductive roles than play both roles inappropriately.

What are unproductive roles? Also named obstructing roles, futile roles are those which destroy team's cohesion, prevent team members from achieving whatever it may achieve.

Among these roles we may mention:

- *Dominating* – talk excessively, interrupt or reduce others to silence.
- *Overanalyzing* – excessively examine each detail.
- *Deterring* – not allow the group reach a conclusion or finalize tasks by means of discussion deviation or disagreement.
- *Being passive* - refuse talking responsibility within team, refuse interaction with the other members.
- *Overgeneralizing* – exaggerate and draw groundless conclusions.
- *Hunting for errors* – refuse to notice others' achievements, excessively criticize others.
- *Taking decisions prematurely* – make decisions before goals were presented, information spread, alternatives discussed or problems defined.

- *Presenting options as facts* – fail to exam the legitimacy of the propositions and state opinions as absolute truth.
- *Rejecting* – turn down ideas because of the person who is expressing them, and not of his/ her achievements.
- *Abusing rank* – make use of status or title to make ideas accepted as opposed to their discussing and assessment.
- *Resisting* – stop all change, improvement or progress attempts, disagree totally and destructively to all other members' suggestions.
- *Distracting* – not focus discussions on required topics, make commentaries to distract attention from the important issues.

Each of these obstructing roles may damage consensus, create a dramatic conflict and inhibit team's performance.

When obstructing roles occur the team has the task to isolate disturbing members and ensure feedback to those who will have to review their behaviour in order to keep being a part of the team. Although there is no behaviour set taken for granted as efficient in any situation or with any individual, some **principles** of ensuring feedback have been found efficient.

- *Feedback focused on behaviour and not the person.* Individuals cannot change their personality or psychological features but they can instead change behaviour. For example, saying "Your comments are not quite on the topic" is more efficient than "You are completely out of the topic".

- *Feedback focused on observations and not judgements.* Facts and obvious proofs are more reliable and acceptable than opinions. For example, saying "Data are not supporting your argument" is more efficient than "You don't get it, do you?"

- *Feedback focused on behaviour in a certain situation, on "here and now" than focused on past or abstract behaviour.* People cannot change something that already happened. They feel frustrated if they cannot identify an incident or a specific behaviour referred to in a certain situation. For example, "You have to agree to others' comments" is more efficient than "You have always been a problem in this team".

- *Feedback focused on sharing ideas and information than on giving advice.* In this case it is recommendable that solutions are identified together. This method helps people with negative behaviour identify by themselves the changes and improvements. For example, "How do you suggest to break this pattern and go on?" is more efficient than "You have to do it this way".

- *Feedback focused on the share of information the receiver may get.* Too great a quantity of information makes the others not listen to it anymore. Instead, a scanty amount of information leads to frustration and misunderstandings. For instance "You seem to have reached a conclusion before all the factors were presented" is more efficient than "Here are some data you may consider and there are lots more".

- *Feedback focused on the value it has to receiver.* Feedback has to be focused on the receiver's value and not on the emotional impact it has for anybody. For example "It has to be said that your excessive talking disturbs and is not useful to the team" is more efficient than "You are the reason our team cannot develop".
- *Feedback focused on time and space so that the personal data are shared at the right moment.* The more specific or the more anchored in a particular context the feedback is, the more efficient. For instance "I need to talk to you on a certain issue during the break" is more efficient than "You consider that your status gives you the right to behave like this but you are wrong".

Concluding, we think that one may talk about performance at team's level when its members play roles facilitating task achievement and group cohesion.

J. Richard Hackman³ has found out that team's efficacy occurs when a considerable effort is driven towards achieving the group's task, when much information, knowledge and numerous skills are allocated to achieve the tasks and the team's unity is indestructible.

In our opinion, a team built up on unity and collaboration who knows to adopt the most efficacious strategies in order to meet the established objectives is a team capable of high performance both for itself and its constituent members.

3 Performance team's characteristics

Recalibration of the performances is based on the concept of high performance team.

High leveled performance teams adopt a set of positive behaviours that include: dinamism, flexibility, action focus, new challenge acceptance.

These teams surpassed long ago the problems related to uncertainty, nonparticipation, focus on own ideas and they focus now their attention towards capitalization based on competencies, high mutual trust, unconditioned team attachment, innovation, continuous learning and development.

Departing from the main questions a team always tries to answer, that is *How may a given team situation be improved?*, *How may a team develop relying on competences?*, *How may innovation and creativity be stimulated?*, *How may a high level of energy within team be maintained?* – we have designed the following pattern of key-questions whose answers may help the team identify behaviours that encourage high performance achievement.

The question pattern that allows the configuration of a high performance team focuses on the following key-aspects:

1. *CLEAR EXPECTATIONS: Are there clear expectations from the team? Do team members understand what their team was built up for? Why are they intrinsically part of it?*

³ Hackman J. R. - *Leading Teams: Setting the stage for great performances*, Harward Business School Press, 2002

At this point explicit share of the organization's values: goal, visions and objectives from the part of all the members is essential. Strong focus on results, the sense of priorities, clarity in decision are also fundamental when the team wants to meet high performance standards. Provided the group's members fully understand the general and specific objectives as well as the way the organizational principles and values are internalized, they will also embrace them.

2. *COMMITMENT: Do individuals wish to be part of a team? Do team's members feel team's mission important? Are members devoted to team's mission and expected result achievement? Are team's members aware that their work is valuable to the organization and their own careers? Do team's members foresee the general recognition of their contribution? Do team's members expect that their abilities are developed within the team? Are team's members delighted by the team's opportunities?*

In the article entitled "Seven keys to building great workteams"⁴, Suzanne Willis shows that commitment towards an organization's goal and values implies that team members understand the way their work help achieve the general organizational objectives and consider that the team's objectives are tangible and in accordance with the organization's mission, respectively values. Commitment becomes the basis of team cooperation.

Team functioning is achieved on the basis of some clearly established rules that take into account both organizational and individual values. There are also situations when conflicts may occur, when the team reconsider its values and objectives so that they are compatible with those of the organization but still reflect their own characteristics.

3. *COMPETENCE: Does the team consider it has the necessary strategies, resources and structure to accomplish its mission? Does the team consider that its members have the knowledge, skills and potential it needs?*

An efficacious team's strenght is directly proportional to its members' abilities and initiative.

4. *COMMUNICATION: Is there an established method by means of which the team receives honest feedback regarding its actions? Does the organization provide with the important information on a regular basis? Do team's members clearly and honestly communicate with each other? Do team's members bring various opinions at the negotiation table? Are the new conflicts exposed?*

Communication is as important as the team's success. For the work team to reach its highest potential, it is necessary that members communicate openly.

This may happen only within an atmosphere where team members are interested in each other, trust each other, accept criticism when proved constructive and focus on solutions and not on problems.

Communication, when open and positive, has a vitale role in creating a unitary whole.

⁴ Willis S.- *7 Keys to building Great Workteams*, www.teambuidinginc.com/articles_7keys_zoglio.htm

5. *COOPERATION: Are team members working efficiently together? Do they manifest trust and respect to one another? Do all team members understand their roles and responsibilities and those of their leaders? May team solve problems, improve the process, choose the objective together? Do team members cooperate to follow the team's plan? Has the team established norms and conduct rules to solve conflicts, to take decision in group? Is the team using the necessary strategy to accomplish its action plan?*

A team's unity is provided by the trust team members show each other. The pride to work within a team manifests through total commitment and involvement, characterized by morality and loyalty.

When the team members are cooperative, trust is the one standing at the basis of the building up the whole interpersonal relationship configuration.

To a team, cooperation means knowing how to cultivate a continuous idea sharing and analysis both within its own members and outside the team. Cooperation is appreciation and respect towards one's discussion partner and mutual trust.

6. *CREATIVITY, INNOVATIVE SPIRIT: Is the organization genuinely interested in changes? Does it praise creative thinking, unique solutions and new ideas? Does it reward people taking risk in order to make improvements? Or does it reward people who help maintaining the status quo?*

Facts show that individuals perceive novelty as opportunity. They give another value to innovation and approach problems creatively looking for continuous improvement. Paraphrasing Tom Peters we may state today, more than ever, that the ones eager to survive have to be flexible and propose new social organization forms: high performance teams.

Having teams able to function efficiently in crisis period is a necessity. High performance teams have not only to respond to change, but also initiate it. In order to help teams deal with change, leaders have to have a positive attitude themselves and help teams see the opportunities. They may ensure the necessary safety for teams willing to take risk, as well as the necessary instruments to have teams innovating.

4 A solution in crisis period -high performance team

The creation of a working and efficient concept to define high performance team which should determine an organization's economical results increase stands for a daring but not impossible undertaking.

The capacity of human resources manager to mobilize the creativity, energy and people's commitment can make the difference between survival or demise of a company.

In the nowadays organizational environment a high performance team has to deal with challenges such as:

CHALLENGE 1: to carry out the task it was built up for (basic goals);

CHALLENGE 2: to continuously improve its performances (performance);

CHALLENGE 3: to reach a higher performance level than it could have been initially foreseen (high performance).

Having this idea in mind, we *consider* that a possible high performance team portrait may be drawn taking into account the tracking down and the configuration of factors that generate a team's capability to act united, efficiently and efficaciously when facing challenges in the organizational environment (figure 1).

Each of the attributes contributes to team development and of its performances. A fair analysis and assessment of these factors create an accurate image on the high performance team concept and implicitly on its capacity to deliver results at the highest standards.

1. Building on differences

The team optimizes its members' aptitudes, knowledge and personal strengths by giving them the possibility to test ideas, review opinions and develop interpersonal intelligence.

Individuals have the right to different opinions while the team has got an efficient way to solve problems and conflicts. Decisions are taken by means of consensus (there is a clear general agreement and everybody is willing to respect it), whereas disagreements are natural, and have solutions.

Team work is considered by the specialists⁵ to cover better the shortages of individualized actions and to have significant effects on each team member's personality, the others' presence is an intellectual stimulus and a trigger for sharing opinions and information.

Even if the expressed solutions may suffer improvements and adjustments within team, the critical analysis develops the team members' self-assessment capacities.

2. Action Orientation. Vision, Shared Values. Common Objectives

Team members are encouraged to have a proactive behaviour, to take risks, to ask themselves continuously questions, whereas difficult and strong answers, learning from experience and mistakes are the ones that encourage team's members progress and development.

3. Continuous Creative Development

Creativity, innovation and risk taking characterize the activity carried on by the team. It stimulates its members to look for new and better methods of achieving the tasks in all their aspects. It cares about change and encourages the constant occurrence of new ideas and solutions to improve the current situation.

Team members are inspired by discoveries and are always in search of new challenges.

⁵ Abrudan D.- *Noi provocări ale managementului resurselor umane*, Editura Solness, Timișoara, 2007



Figure 1 Factors defining a high performance team

Source: Abrudan D.- *Noi provocări ale managementului resurselor umane*, Editura Solness, Timișoara, 2007

4. Open Communication

Communication among team members is open and work relationships are born in favour of team work: people listen to one another, express all their points of view, and there is a supportive atmosphere.

Communication in a positive spirit has the role to ensure the energy necessary to work in team. Open communication strengthens the team cohesion so that its members may say what they think, ask for help, share new ideas, and also accept the possibility to make mistakes.

5. Coordination and Cohesion

Any team's members always work together, coordinating with each other since the desired goal is to obtain not a set of individual products but the team's one product.

This coordination leads to strong ties among the individual members of a team, ties based on: mutual trust, accuracy in actions, creativity, respect for others' time, team spirit.

In our opinion, cooperation among individuals and the team's members' interdependency degree are the essential ingredients for any team's success, and even more for high performance teams.

Cooperation (cowork) implies collaboration, active involvement in a certain action achievement, based on propositions or idea exchange. If *collaboration* is a form of interaction among team members that consists in common interest issue solutioning, where each member takes part actively and effectively, *cooperation* is a form of learning, of mutual interpersonal/ intergroup action, with a variable duration that results from the involved individuals' mutual influences.

Therefore the more each of the team members feels like an integrated part in the team, the more he contributes to its performance.

6. Well Defined Roles. Individual and Mutual Responsibility

A team's strength is directly proportioned with the skills, initiative and role each team member has.

Whetten D. and Cameron K.⁶ consider that self assessment and own responsibility characterize a high performance team and the sense of individual responsibility is much higher than any responsibility imposed by any team leader.

In our opinion, the understanding of each team member's role of working in the team, the achievement of getting to know better the team members and the increase of individual responsibility, the identification of individual and team's strong and weak points, the development of members' communication skills, the supporting of the leader in the common interest points and the consolidation of his/her position within team, the removal of routine – all of these represent factors that may turn a team without performance in a high performance one.

7. Quality, Efficacy and Efficiency in Action

The decisions' quality derives from the fully utilization of team members' aptitudes and knowledge. They are shared and lead to a total commitment. Team's decisions are expressed under action form; each member knows what s/he is supposed to do, with whom to treat and when. Teams generate real performance standard trends. Team members combine seriousness with unexpected and new quality levels. They manifest intolerance towards mediocre results precisely because performance standards are very high.

8. Mutual Trust. Belonging feeling cultivation

Members cherish and support each other mutually, having full confidence in one another. They give sincere and responsible feedback and members' intelligence, honesty and loyalty, including the leader's, characterize all team's actions.

⁶ Whetten D., Cameron K.- *Developing management skills*, Prentice Hall, 2005, pg. 468.

They cultivate the members' pride to belong (in)to the team. The actions of each member are based on taking individual responsibility in order to achieve the team's objectives and then of the organization.

The belonging pride is to be found in the fact that each member identifies him/herself with the team's mission and values, s/he feels valuable to the team and that his/her actions matter.

Within team, each member treats the organization's assets as if they were his/her own and acts keeping always in mind the long term success of the team to which s/he belongs.

9. Competence-based Leadership

The obstacles in the communication process among members, the lack of the belonging feeling, the erosion of faith in the organization's values and objectives, the interpersonal cohesion when it acts as a distructive factor to the team's cohesion, keeping the team's members only in the personal comfort zone, fact that diminishes the involvement, development and respectively the performance increase are only a few problems a team deals with because of an incompetent leadership practice.

Under these conditions a leadership based on competences becomes a must. Different team members embrace leadership according to current task and team's needs. The formal leader has the role of team trainer and mentor.

Conclusion

In a *turbulent period*, the organizations must constantly adapt to the evolution of the internal and external factors.

More than that, the competitive spirit, the desire of being the best, the open-minded character, the promoting of the innovative projects, the permanent knowledge assimilation, the team work orientation, the practice of authority delegation, the new complex responsibilities assumption, the consolidation of the employees respect, the reliability on the employees and client orientation have become the main concerns of the companies that desire to achieve performance.

These organizations are different from the others especially because of their performance-oriented culture, a culture capable of capitalizing the whole organization's architecture: the abilities of their people, the structures, the systems and the technology, existing a dominant preoccupation of the employees towards quality and excellence.

Being innovative and capitalizing creativity and quality more than quantity both for the individual and organization level, romanian's managers know that *an inspirate solution for crisis is based on the concept of high performance team*.

Now, more than ever, people understand that the best that they cand do is to be a high performing team, to consider what can be build, strengthen and rebuild together.

The strength of the team work will make the difference between survival or demise of a company.

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