

A Twelve Session Short Course on Work Teams: Outline and Readings

Course Outline

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Reading Assignments

----- Day One -----

A. Introduction: Work Teams in Organizations

Case Discussion: Nobody on the Podium: Lessons for Leaders from the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra (video case available from Case Services, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University). "Quality of leadership" is invariably among the first explanations offered for why a work team has succeeded or failed. This video case about the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra requires us to dig deeper, since there is no conductor on the podium. What does Orpheus have to teach us about group dynamics and leadership? What about the Orpheus style of operating provides a positive model for other work teams, and what would one not want to emulate?

----- Day Two -----

B. Group Relations in Organizations

1. Group formation and development

Gersick, C. J. G. (1990). The students. In J. R. Hackman (Ed.). Groups that work. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 89-111. A case description of a group of students laboring together to complete a group project by a fixed deadline. This was one of the groups that gave rise to the theory of group development described in the next reading.

Gersick, C. J. G. (1988). Time and transition in work teams: Toward a new model of group development. Academy of Management Journal, 31, 9-41. Contrasts with more common stage models (briefly discussed in the article). Note in particular Gersick's data about what happens at the midpoint of a group's life.

Ancona, D., & Chong, C. L. (1999). Cycles and synchrony: The temporal role of context in team behavior. In R. Wageman (Ed.), Groups in context. Stamford, CT: JAI Press. How pace, cycles, and rhythm shape what happens in groups throughout their lifespans.

----- Day Three -----

2. Models of group interaction

a. Normative and developmental models

Bales, R. F., & Strodtbeck, F. L. Phases in group problem-solving. Chapter 30 in D. Cartwright & A. Zander, Group dynamics (3rd ed.). Applies interaction process analysis to the identification of three phases that groups go through in solving problems (orientation, evaluation, control).

Bales, R. F. (1999). Social interaction systems: Theory and measurement. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers. Read Chapter 1 on "Overview of the SYMLOG system" (pp. 3-27). An overview of Bales' current thinking about group behavior; note the movement from the descriptive emphasis in his earlier work (the first reading) toward a more normative point of view.

Gersick, C. J. G., & Hackman, J. R. (1990). Habitual routines in task-performing teams. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 47, 65-97. Groups, like individuals, fall into habitual patterns of behavior. This article takes a normative perspective in analyzing the benefits and liabilities of group routines, with special attention to the conditions under which they develop, persist, and terminate.

Kaplan, R. E. (1979). The conspicuous absence of evidence that process consultation enhances task performance. Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 15, 346-360. And here is a more skeptical view of process-focused normative approaches. If process consultation helps, why do empirical studies not show that it does?

----- Day Four -----

b. Interpretive models

Rioch, M. J. (1975). "The work of Wilfred Bion on groups." Chapter 3 (pp. 21-33) in A. D. Colman & W. H. Bexton (Eds.), Group relations reader. Sausalito, CA: GREX. Bion is an important group theorist whose writing, unfortunately, is sometimes as dense as his ideas are penetrating. If Rioch's exposition tweaks your interest and you would like to learn more, see the selections from Bion's own writings in Chapter 2 of the same book.

Smith, K. K., & Berg, D. N. (1987). A paradoxical conception of group dynamics. Human Relations, 40, 633-658. An alternative and original way of thinking about within-group conflict, one that suggests that not all such conflicts should be (or even can be) resolved. If this approach interests you, you can learn more from their book Paradoxes of group life. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1987).

Murnighan, J. K., & Conlon, D. E. (1991). The dynamics of intense work groups: A study of British string quartets. Administrative Science Quarterly, 36, 165-186. Applies paradox theory to an interesting type of group, and raises questions about whether the inherent contradictions of group life are better dealt with overtly or implicitly.

----- Day Five -----

c. Decision-making models

Brown, R. (1986). Social psychology (2nd ed.). New York: Free Press. See Chapter 6 (pp. 200-248) for an excellent overview of the group polarization literature, with an extended application to jury decision-making.

Janis, I. L. Groupthink. Reading 36 in J. R. Hackman, E. E., Lawler, & L. W. Porter (Eds.). (1983). Perspectives on behavior in organizations (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill. A brief overview of the "groupthink" phenomenon and the evidence Janis used in developing his ideas.

Whyte, G. (1998). Recasting Janis's groupthink model: The key role of collective efficacy in decision fiascoes. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 73, 185-209. Summarizes the scholarly work that followed Janis's influential and controversial hypotheses, and presents an alternative formulation based on recent findings about cognitive and social processes in decision-making groups.

Hirokawa, R. Y., & Johnston, D. D. (1989). Toward a general theory of group decision making. Small Group Behavior, 20, 500-523. Presents a model of group decision that attempts to identify and organize the factors that most powerfully affect decisional outcomes. What is your assessment of the success of their enterprise?

----- Day Six -----

C. Group Task Performance

1. Models of group performance

Leavitt, H. J. (1975). Suppose we took groups seriously. . . In E. L. Cass & F. G. Zimmer (Eds.), Man and work in society. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold. What if we really took groups seriously, and used them (rather than individuals) as the basic building blocks of organizations? Here are the wonderful things that would evolve. Do you agree?

Maier, N. R. F. Assets and liabilities in group problem solving: The need for an integrative function. Reading 37 in Hackman-Lawler-Porter (cited above). Identifies the assets and liabilities of using groups to solve problems, and then suggests how leaders can facilitate group processes.

Hackman, J. R. (2002). Leading teams, Chapter 1 ("The challenge"). Describes how two different airlines designed and managed their flight attendant teams, with quite different results, and discusses how one would assess a team's "effectiveness."

----- Day Seven -----

2. Influences on group performance

Hackman, Leading teams, Chapters 2 ("A real team") and 3 ("Compelling direction"). The first two of the five conditions for team effectiveness we will examine.

Edmondson, A. (1999). Psychological safety and learning behavior in work teams. Administrative Science Quarterly, 44, 350-383. How structural factors and shared beliefs shape team performance outcomes.

Staw, B. M. (1975). Attribution of the "causes" of performance: A general alternative interpretation of cross-sectional research on organizations. Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 13, 414-432. Why our usual inferences about the causes of group performance (as well as cross-sectional research on the causes of performance differences) are usually wrong.

----- Day Eight -----

3. Creating conditions for team effectiveness

Hackman, Leading teams, Chapters 4 ("Enabling structure") and 5 ("Supportive context"). The next two of the five conditions--these addressing structural and organizational supports for team effectiveness.

Jehn, K. A., Northcraft, G. B., & Neal, M. A. (1999). Why differences make a difference: A field study of diversity, conflict, and performance in workgroups. Administrative Science Quarterly, 44, 741-763. What is the impact on team effectiveness of member heterogeneity?

Poza, E. J., & Marcus, M. L. (1980, Winter). Success story: The team approach to work restructuring. Organizational Dynamics, 3-25. Here is a team design that did work. How did this team stand on the four enabling conditions you have read about thus far?

----- Day Nine -----

D. Leadership in Organizations

1. Leader traits and behavioral styles

Fiedler, F. E. The leadership game: Matching the man to the situation. Reading 34 in Hackman-Lawler-Porter (1st ed., 1977). A concise statement of basic LPC theory, and comments on its applications.

Vroom, V. H., & Jago, A. G. (1988). The new leadership: Managing participation in organizations. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall. Chapter 5 (pp. 49-77) on "Situational theories of participation: The Vroom-Yetton Model" summarizes the authors' approach.

Sims, H. P., & Manz, C. C. (1984). Observing leader verbal behavior: Toward reciprocal determinism in leadership theory. Journal of Applied Psychology, 69, 222-232. Makes two contributions: (a) reviews the "reverse causality" studies in the leadership literature, and (b) explores the viability of an observational system for studying leader verbal behavior.

----- Day Ten -----

2. Coaching work teams

Hackman, Leading teams, Chapter 6 ("Expert coaching"). The fifth and final condition for effectiveness--namely, the quality of the hands-on coaching that a team receives--whether from a designated team leader or from other members.

Case Discussion: The Overhead Reduction Task Force (written case, video, and teaching note available from Case Services, Harvard Business School). This video enactment shows the entire life history of a team that has troubles. The case and video provide an opportunity to integrate and apply what we have learned about both (a) the structural conditions that foster team effectiveness, and (b) the kinds of coaching behaviors that can help teams solve the problems they encounter and exploit unanticipated opportunities.

----- Day Eleven -----

3. Improving leadership effectiveness

Hackman, Leading teams, Chapter 7 ("Imperatives for leaders"). Implications of Hackman's approach for leader selection, training, and behavior.

Kerr, S., & Jermier, J. M. (1978). Substitutes for leadership: Their meaning and measurement. Organizational Behavior and Human Performance, 22, 375-403. Certain individual, task and organizational factors appear to operate as "substitutes for leadership," negating the leader's influence on subordinates' attitudes and performance. A number of these substitutes are identified and devices for their measurement are suggested.

Cohen, M. D., & March, J. G. (1986). Leadership and ambiguity (2nd ed.). Boston: Harvard Business School Press. Chapter 9 (pp. 195-229) on "Leadership in an organized anarchy" summarizes the authors' views about leadership under conditions of ambiguity, and provides a set of guidelines for taking action in organized anarchies. Although based on the authors' research on college presidents, their conclusions have generality far beyond the academy.

McEwan, I. (1997, May 17). Us or me. The New Yorker, 72-77. The angst of it all.

----- Day Twelve -----

E. Conclusion

Hackman, Leading teams, Chapter 8 ("Thinking differently about teams"). The broader implications of the approach to social behavior in teams and organizations that we have taken in this course.

Argyris, C. (1969). The incompleteness of social psychological theory: Examples from small group, cognitive consistency, and attribution research. American Psychologist, 24, 893-908. A critique of the descriptive orientation of much social psychological research. To what extent do you agree with what he has to say about group research?

LaFarge, V. Termination in groups. (1990). In J. McCollom & M. Gillette (Eds.), Groups in context (pp. 172-185). Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley. The last reading, and the end of our own group. To what extent do LaFarge's observations resonate?