The Need for High Performance Teams in Indian IT Industry

Rapls provide alternate abstract

The team orientation is growing in current organizations. Teams, virtual teams, collocated teams, and war rooms have been defined. The essential characteristics of high performance teams have been discussed. The works of Tuckman, Eldho, Katzenbach and Smith and earlier works on finding the characteristics of high performance teams have been highlighted. In the US, IBM and Motorola are already having high performance teams in their organizations. Indian scenario and the need for high performance teams in Indian software services firms have been stressed upon.

The Indian IT industry has crossed the $60-bn mark in 2009. It has seen the double-digit growth rate even during tough economic situations. More than two million workers are directly employed by this industry and another eight million people are indirectly dependent on it. Hence, a total of 10 million people are directly or indirectly dependent on this industry in India. Thus, there is a need for us to think about, how are we working and delivering solutions to the customers in this industry. How are we organizing and executing inside the organization to provide solutions and timely response to customers' queries and problems.

Traditionally, organizations have given much importance to individual contributions. Because of the growing nature of complexity and inherent benefits of achieving parallelism and reduced response time to customer problems, work teams came into being in an organization for executing the projects. The research on teams started with Fredric Taylor's scientific experiments on workers in manufacturing and assembly line plants. Slowly, the importance of team orientation was felt in the knowledge-based industries such as IT, biotechnology, pharmaceutical and management consulting industries. Today, more than 80% of the *Fortune* 500 companies are executing their projects and achieving their organizational objectives using work teams in their organizations.

A team is a collection of individuals working towards a common organizational goal. These days there are many forms of teams. There are traditionally collocated teams in the organizations. These teams stay at the same geographic location or office. There is one more concept known as war room. If a team is developing a complex product, all the team members sit in the same room. This room is known as war room. There are other types of teams such as virtual teams. These teams are distributed geographically across different locations. Sometimes, virtual teams may spread across different countries and continents. Virtual teams use the technology to the maximum extent for the purpose of communication. They use e-mail, video conferences, teleconferences, and web conferences extensively. These team members might not have seen each other physically

before the starting of or during the project. However, they all work towards the common goal and develop the product. Indian IT firms like TCS, Infosys, Wipro, and HCL use this kind of teams very extensively. In high technology and product development companies such as Intel, Nokia, IBM, HP, Sun, and Microsoft one can find war rooms frequently.

Modern day objective of these IT firms is to achieve more productivity using project teams. What western organizations are looking for is high performance in work teams. One can find high performance teams in the US in organizations like IBM, Microsoft, HP and Motorola. The high performance teams exceed organizational expectations, increases the revenues, and reduces the costs for the organizations.

There are different schools of thought for a team to become a high performance team. According to Tuckman's theory, a team becomes performing team once it crosses the stages such as forming, storming, and norming. Later, the team becomes a performing team. According to Katzenbach & Smith, a team can be called a high performance team once it crosses the stages of work group, pseudo team, potential team and real team. The next stage of real team is when the team becomes a high performance team. Even the senior management works as a team in modern organizations.

More than 80% of the *Fortune 500* companies are achieving their organizational objectives using teams. Team orientation is growing much in knowledge-based industries such as IT, pharmaceutical, and biotechnology

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industries. Scientists are working in teams in space research and high technology areas. Every organization is trying to achieve high performance using teams. High performance teams became the area of concentration for research community in human resources and organizational behavioral areas of management.

Jon R Katzenbach and Douglas K Smith (1993) have defined a team in their *Harvard Business Review* article "The Discipline of Teams" as "a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable."

According to Jon R Katzenbach and Douglas K Smith (2005), a high performance team is "a team that outperforms all other like teams by an order of magnitude and also outperforms all reasonable expectations given its composition. It is identifiable by its results and by the individual members' commitment to one another, a commitment that transcends the team situation."

Usually, high performance teams have a common purpose/goal, regularly meets deadlines, are cost-effective, generates profits for the organization, are self-managing teams, exhibits collective decision making and shared leadership, and has proper conflict management.

Characteristics of High Performance Teams

High performance teams in organizations exhibit certain characteristics. They have a common purpose, objective and goal. Team members in high performance teams exhibit mutual trust and mutual respect. There is personal commitment from team members towards the project and organization. Team members exhibit interpersonal commitment as well. They care for the growth and well-being of the fellow team members. There is shared leadership in the team. Team leader changes informally based on the situation. Whoever is known and confident in that situation, he or she takes care of the situation.

There is group decision making in the team. They collectively solve the problems. They welcome conflicts and manage them effectively. Team members communicate effectively in the team. Team members feel accountable and also exhibit mutual accountability towards the project. They speak openly and share their concerns with others. Instead of reporting to the team leader, they update the fellow team members, take their consent and approvals frequently. They feel that they belong to the team. Also, the high performance teams look to satisfy all the stakeholders of the project. Usually, the team members in high performance teams have

complementary skills. In high performance teams, individuals must take risks involving conflict, trust, interdependence, and hard work.

The characteristics of high performance teams exhibited in the organization is possible with the kind of organizational climate and trust between team members in the team. It can be achieved through long-term association of the team members with complementary skills in the project. IT Organizations like IBM and Motorola have experimented and had success with high performance teams.

According to Eldho (2004), teamwork increases productivity, satisfaction and creativity, and helps in reaching organizational and individual goals in an effective manner. According to him, two factors such as system factors and human factors contribute to the high performance in organizations. System factors include organizational impact, defined focus, alignment and interaction with external entities, and performance measures. Human factors contributing to high performance are knowledge and skills, need of the individual and group culture.

According to Regan (1999), teams should be given impossible goals to achieve high performance levels. Clear performance standards are very much needed for high performance teams. Teams are required to maintain the performance ethic (Katzenbach and Smith, 2005). To work in high performance teams, individuals should have technical skills, problem solving and decision-making skills and interpersonal skills.

Sharp *et al.* (2000), have discussed the developing role of teams in achieving organizational agility and introduced key elements such as shared vision, trust, and openness while trying to achieve the high level of performance. A single person should not be the leader throughout the course of the project; leadership should change based on the situation.

According to Sharp *et al.* (2000), a high performance team is a team of people who have unleashed their potential towards their stakeholders' shared purpose. The key enablers of high performance are team members' competencies, skills, processes, tools and techniques, interpersonal skills, communication, personality preferences, value system, shared vision, purpose, goals, direction, openness and organizational values.

The expected performance of team is calculated by summing up the each individual's best performance. Measurement of interpersonal skills includes measurement of conflict resolution and communication in the team.

The Indian Scenario

The component of product development in Indian software services sector is very small when compared with the services provided to the customers. Hence, teams working in these firms have relatively less project duration. There is not much scope for team members to build trust with fellow team members. By the time, a team member becomes comfortable with a fellow team member, the project is coming to a closure and he will be moved to other project team. This affects the confidence of the team members as well. Hence, there is a need

for the Indian IT firms to look at achieving high performance using teams. Without mutual trust a team cannot reach high performance levels.

Once you have high performance teams in the organization, the senior management can meet the goals with improved confidence. We can observe high performance teams in the organization at the cross-functional level or at senior management level as well. HP is the best example for having a high performance team at the senior management level. By taking these examples and inherent benefits into consideration, it is time for the Indian IT industry to go for high performance teams, which will improve the organization's confidence level and also reduce customer response time with financial benefits to the performing company.

Conclusion

High performance teams are being used in time critical systems and in projects where response time needs to be fast. Some of the disaster recovery teams in the world and business continuity teams in software corporations are also high performance teams. To meet the customer pressure and end-user satisfaction with quick response, there is need for high performance teams in the Indian software services firms as well. With the characteristics of high performance teams discussed in this article, one can find the gaps in their team characteristics and make high performance teams possible in India as well, that will make a long-lasting impact on the global IT industry. ▶◀