
**AN INVESTIGATION ON THE PERCEPTION OF THE AGRICULTURAL
EXTENSION AND EDUCATION STAFF ABOUT TEAM EFFECTIVENESS IN
TEHRAN CITY, IRAN**

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Abstract

This study has examined the perception of agricultural extension and education staff about team approach. People who participated in this study were agricultural extension and education staff in Tehran, city, Iran in year 2004. Respondents were selected through random sampling technique. The results of the study indicated that respondents approximately male and were on average 37 years of age. Majority of them had bachelor's degree and had on average 12 years of working experience. Respondents are strongly agreed with identifying objectives clearly and appropriate leadership is the most important factors, which influence team-working effectiveness. Factors such as setting values, clarifying objectives, provide a model; identifying member's strengths make an effective team leader. There is not any significant relationship between genders; working experience and perception toward factors make a team effective.

Introduction

Globalization, social diversity, information and knowledge explosion, and technological advances are revolutionizing organizations around the world. Organizations can no longer rely on the traditional hierarchical structures and a few key people to maintain a competitive advantage. Using the collective knowledge and richness of diverse perspectives will guide our organizations into the 21st century (Blanchard, 2004).

Teams are an important element in the new high performance forms of organization. A team is defined as a reasonably small group of people, who bring to the table a set of complementary and appropriate skills, and who hold themselves mutually accountable for achieving a clear and identifiable set of goals (Hick, 1998).

Teams exist in various forms and sizes, and some people hold that there is an ideal number for a team. These estimates have ranged between five and a dozen, but even for the same team task, it seems clear that an experienced team might manage with fewer members than an inexperienced team. Teams can be on the same site, in the same building, same floor, same office, or apart to a greater or lesser degree. Some research shows that once team members are more than 80 feet apart, even on the same floor of the same building, communication difficulties start (Dent, 2003).

Groups go through various stages as they develop to effective team working. A common model used to track the development of groups was suggested by Tuckman et al (1977) is: Forming – characterized by polite and manner able greeting. Members also check out their feelings regarding membership of the group, what roles they may take and what the purpose of the group is.

Storming – typically this can be an uncomfortable time for groups where members are often testing the limits and exploring what is possible. Rebelliousness, competition and the setting up of cliques are all features of this stage.

Norming – at this stage the group is beginning to work through its conflicts and agree on ways of functioning towards effective performance.

Performing – now the team is working together towards a common goal. All teams will develop at different speeds and some may get stuck in one of the phases. The important thing is to be aware of the subtle and intricate dynamics of the group development process.

The characteristics of team roles have been the subject of Dr Meredith Belbin's (1981) research for many years. He Identify these roles for team members:

Coordinator (was chairman): critical thinking only just above average. A relaxed but fairly strong and dominant character that is non-aggressive, but can assert him.

Shaper: leads from front with 'all guns blazing'. Likes action, quick results and willing followers. Pushes himself and others to get the job done as the main priority.

Plant (ideas man): advances new thoughts very often independent of his own specialism. Usually high intelligence.

Monitor evaluator: good critical thinker and evaluator of ideas. Serious attitude, cautious, usually objective and very perceptive.

Implementer (was company worker): usually accepts rules and conventions of the organization. Works to do a good job within the system.

Team worker: perceives feelings, needs and concerns of the people in the group. Observant of people's strengths and weaknesses.

Resource investigator: people orientated team member. Usually restless, enquiring attitude to life. A driving force and always going out to find new things and ideas – has a wide range of contacts.

Completer/finisher: often tense, sometimes anxious and has a compulsive concern to finish. High nervous energy put to productive use.

Specialist: typically dedicated individuals who pride themselves on acquiring technical skills and specialized knowledge.

A review of research on work team effectiveness reveals 10 characteristics of successful teams (Axelrod, 2000; Bradford, 1978; Brillhart, 1983; Ciulla, 1998; Cranton, 1998; Fisher, 1995; Hackman, 1990; Wellins et al., 1994):

Clear objectives: the team's overall objective needs to be identified and defined in terms, which allow each member to understand the same goal.

Appropriate leadership: leadership is a shared function based on the need of the task rather than through consideration of formal role or position-based power.

Suitable membership: for a team to be able to work productively, its members must display the range of skills, knowledge and experience and the right 'mix' of these for the task it is undertaking.

Commitment to the team: Membership is highly valued and member behavior is strongly influenced by considerations of team success. This is very different from the rather simple and (from the work effectiveness point of view) rather unproductive 'WE' feeling that is part of the experience of simply being with a group of people who get on well together and enjoy each other's company.

A supportive team climate: Members are trusted to contribute in a mature fashion. Self-control replaces imposed control. Responsibility is widely shared throughout the team on a rational basis, given the skills and other strengths among members.

Working techniques: The team needs to invest time and effort into developing working techniques, methods, procedures and ground rules to move the team toward its goal in the most efficient way consistent with preserving those other qualities associated with effective teams.

Learning: the team and its members learn from their experiences, including their mistakes. Mistakes made in good faith do not lead to heavy penalties, but are incorporated into expectations about the team and its members maturing over time.

New members: new team members are quickly integrated into the team, their strengths identified, and contribution defined.

Relationships with other teams: an effective team also invests time and energy into developing ground rules for managing its relationships with other teams in a positive and productive way. This includes identifying areas of work where collaboration would clearly help one or both teams achieve results more efficiently or effectively. It includes maintaining open contact and frequently reviewing tasks priorities.

Success: the effectiveness of a team grows. All the conditions set out above develop more extensively and readily to the extent that the team meets with early, continued and acknowledged success. The cliché, "Nothing succeeds like success," is entirely applicable to the development of effective teams and in the process of developing and reinforcing the conditions underpinning demonstrated effectiveness.

Although it is likely that the leadership role will shift one team member to another, determined by task demands on skills and other resources, the fact remains that there is normally a team leader designated by the organization and considered responsible for the outcomes from his/her team's performance.

These factors makes an effective team leader: Setting values: Clarifying objectives, Provide a model, Identifying members' strengths, Delegation, Getting help, Flexibility of approach, Represent the team, Develops team members, Feedback, Is available (Dent, 2003).

As organizations, including Extension, move from a paradigm valuing individual work to focusing on team efforts, the leader no longer simply manages tasks. The role instead requires facilitating processes to create fertile team environments. Leadership, rather than residing in one person, is now "accomplished as a team function, with and through teams (Kinlaw, 1991, p. 51)." Leadership goals in a team context include increased group development and performance (Kinlaw, 1991) and building trust, autonomy, and authority of team members (Cottrill, 1997). This requires leaders to serve as co-learners, resources, models, and problem solvers, troubleshooters, and advocates for collaborative learning (Cranton, 1998).

Purpose of the paper

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perception of agricultural extension and education staff about the factors, which make a team effective in Tehran city, Iran. Specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Describe agricultural extension and education staff by demographic characteristics;
2. Determine the agricultural extension and education staff perception about the factors influence effectiveness of teamwork,
3. Measure agricultural extension and education staff perceptions with respect to the effectiveness of team leadership,
4. Determine relationship between personal characteristics of agricultural extension and education staff and their perceptions toward the factors influence effectiveness of a teamwork.

Method and Procedures

This study utilized a descriptive-correlational surveying approach to examine the perception of agricultural extension and education Staff about Team effectiveness in Tehran City, Iran. The population of the study consists of extension staff in Tehran (N= 180). Respondents who participated in this study were selected through random sampling technique (n=123).

The Content and face validity were established by a panel of experts consisting of faculties members at colleges of agriculture (extension education department) of Tarbiat Modares University. A pilot test was conducted with 15 staffs. Questionnaire reliability was estimated by calculating Coronbach alpha. The overall Reliability for the instrument was established at 0/92.

Independent variables are gender and working experience and the only dependent variable is respondent's perception towards the factors that make a team effective.

Findings

Agricultural extension and education staff that participated in the study was male (82.2) and were on average 37 years of age. Regarding level of education, the majority 65/5% of them had bachelor's degree and had on average 12 years of working experience.

Table 1 shows the rank, mean and standard deviation of factors, which make a team effective. Out of 10 factors, Respondents are strongly agreed with 2 factors. Identifying objectives clearly (4.82) and appropriate leadership (4.71) are the most important factors, which influence team-working effectiveness. Six Factors received mean rating of 4 and above and other 4 factors received mean rating 3 and above.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondent's Perception towards the Factors make a team effective.

Rank	Factors	Mean	S.D
1	Identifying objectives clearly make a team effective	4.82	0.39
2	Appropriate leadership make a team effective	4.71	0.51
3	Commitment to the team make a team effective	4.42	0.69
4	Suitable membership make a team effective	4.35	0.74
5	Developing working techniques make a team effective	4.32	0.67
6	A supportive team climate make a team effective	4.23	0.64
7	Relationship with other Teams make a team effective	3.85	0.74
8	Learning from experiences make a team effective	3.84	0.89
9	Team's Success make a team effective	3.75	0.96

10	Identifying and coordinating New Member's strengths make a team effective	3.07	0.84
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Note: Mean range from 1(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

Agricultural extension and education staff stated that setting values with a mean rating of 4.59 and clarifying objectives (4.57) make team leadership effective. Generally all 11 factors received mean rating 3 and above, it shows respondents are agreeing with all of factors (Table2).

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation of Respondent's Perception towards the Factors make an effective team leader.

Rank	Factors	Mean	S.D
1	Setting values make an effective team leader	4.59	0.66
2	Clarifying objectives make an effective team leader	4.57	0.70
3	Develops team members make an effective team leader	4.27	0.84
4	Feedback make an effective team leader	4.19	0.79
5	Provide a model make an effective team leader	4.02	0.70
6	Identifying members' strengths make an effective team leader	4.00	0.81
7	Being a Delegate of a team make an effective team leader	3.95	0.77
8	Being available make an effective team leader	3.93	0.90
9	Flexibility of approach make a team leader effective	3.82	0.81
10	Represent the team make a team leader effective	3.78	0.85
11	Getting help make an effective team leader	3.65	0.81

Note: Mean range from 1(strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

The T- test revealed that there is not any significant relationship between men and women perception towards factors which make an effective team working (Table 3).

Table 3. Independent sample T-test for gender and perception toward factors make a team effective.

Independent variable	n	Mean	S.D	T-value	probe
Male	108	4.15	0.39		
Female	15	4.11	0.28		
Overall	123			0.286	0.78

Kendall's tau correlation coefficient used to identify the relationship between working experience and perception toward factors make a team effective (Table 4). The results shows that there is not significant correlation between working experience and perception toward factors make a team effective, only in one of the factors "commitment to the team" there is significant correlation.

Table 4. Correlation between working experience and perception toward factors make a team effective.

Dependent variable	Kendall tau's
Identifying objectives clearly make a team effective	-0.165
Appropriate leadership make a team effective	-0.0.65
Commitment to the team make a team effective	-0.245*

Suitable membership make a team effective	-0.53
Developing working techniques make a team effective	-.177
A supportive team climate make a team effective	-0.060
Relationship with other Teams make a team effective	-0.042
Learning from experiences make a team effective	0.027
Team's Success make a team effective	-0.30
Identifying and coordinating new member's strengths make a team effective	0.033
Overall	0.328

*: $P \leq 0.05$

Conclusions and Implications

Extension using mass or group methods has been used as part of extension programs over a long period Woods et al (1993). The results of this study confirm the observation of Dent (2003) that factors such as Clear objective, Appropriate leadership, Suitable membership, Commitment to the team: A supportive team climate, Working techniques, Learning, New members, Relationships with other teams, Success have influence on team effectiveness. All these 10 factors received mean rating 3 and above. There has been a great deal of research into the subject of team effectiveness over the last decade or so and there is a consensus on what factors must be controlled in order to set up and run effective teams.

Hick (1998) stated there are three areas of group behavior that must be addressed for teams to be effective. The team must work hard. The effort that the team puts in to get the job done is dependent on whether the nature of the task motivates the members of the team and whether the goals are challenging. The team must have the right mix of skills to bring to the table. These skills include technical, problem solving and interpersonal skills.

Results from this study show These 11 factors makes an effective team leader: Setting values: Clarifying objectives, Provide a model, Identifying members' strengths, Delegation, Getting help, Flexibility of approach, Represent the team, Develops team members, Feedback, Is available. Respondent are agree with all 11 factors. Fritz et al (2004) in the study of team development found that the team leader in her study had the least amount of status in the group, yet appeared to hold the respect and admiration of the other, higher status team members. This could be due to the technical expertise the team leader possessed. Another salient of the team leader in her study was her ability to empathize with the other team members. Kellet et all (2002) stated that the ability to empathize with others has been identified as a component of effective leadership.

Due to examine the relationship between dependent and independent variables we found there is not any significant relationship between gender and perception towards the factors, which make a team effective. This shows gender dons not effect perception towards factors make a team effective. Also there is not any significant relationship between working experience and perception towards the factors that make a team effective.

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