



Teams and the Dynamics of Collaboration: An Antidote for Educational Organization Efficiency

OLATOUN AKINSOLU
Osun State University, Nigeria

Abstract. Like other organization managing educational organization is based on participation of participants' assumptions and expectations be they implicit or explicit, about organizational events and behaviours, it is on this that all management decisions and actions are based. For effective roll out of schools programmes and activities, there is need for interactive relationship which helps in exploring the organizational content, exploring alternative views and providing the bases for changes in practice. Practitioners and academics interested in the management of educational institutions, and indeed the public sector more widely, increasingly recognize the necessity for shared power to resolve particular difficult problems within the system. . Effective management of teams within any given organization determined the success of the organization. It reinforce the teams, get them more dedicated and commitment thus making them to function as a cohesive, coordinated, integrated unit in handling organizational issues. Based on this premise this paper examines practical guides to leading teams with expertise, covering subjects such as defining the skills required by both teams members and their leader and maximizing the performance of the team through effective collaboration. The paper further analyzed team's development, its stages which call for dynamics of collaborative practices within the education system. A framework for effective use of collaboration for educational efficiency within the education sector was also discussed. The paper concludes that individual acting alone within the system never get clue to issues a times therefore teamwork and effective collaborative needs to be cherished and adored by any educational organization because it is the foundation of all successful management

Keywords: Teams, Education.

1. Introduction:

Education has been seen as a bastion for economic and socio- cultural and political development of nations and individuals (Obanyan, 2006). Like all every other

organizations, education sector strives in dealing with efficiency issues, handling change and innovation for high turnout productivity and thus making the system serve as a cutting edge for other organizations hence many bought into the idea of shared power to resolve organizational issues and proffer a way forward (Stewart, 1996). As a result there has been a growth in joint working arrangement of various types, such as collaborations, partnership, federation and outsourcing (Michael, 2006).

Managing educational organization effectively need to be based on participation of participants' assumptions, and expectations be they implicit or explicit, about the organizational events and behaviours, it is on this that all management decisions and actions are based. The need for interactive relationship within educational organization helps in exploring the organizational content, exploring alternative views and providing the bases for changes in practice. The complexity and rapid change of our work within the educational system today requires collective learning, in solving problem together and experiencing optimum success and goal achievement. Therefore, for any organization to succeed in recent time, the idea of teamwork which relies solely on effective group collaboration needs to be cherished and adored, because it is the foundation of all successful management.

Managers within the education system must have better understanding of teams, team's development, be well equipped with necessary tips on dynamics of collaboration for effective teamwork within the system. Effective management of teams within any given organization determined the success of the organization. It reinforces the teams, get them more dedicated and commitment thus making them to function as a cohesive, coordinated, integrated unit in handling organizational issues (Kooiman, 1993).

2. Teams and Teamwork within the Educational Setting

Teams within the education setting are two or more people who must coordinate their activities with close coordination among the team members to accomplish a common goal within the system. Team performance includes both the outputs produced by the group or team as a whole, as well as the contribution of individual team members to the success of the team (Keith, 1980). He stressed further that a group is able to work as a team only after all the persons in the group know the roles of all the others with whom they will be interacting.

According to (Robert and Hindle, 1998) a true team is a living constantly changing, dynamic force in which a number of people come together to work. Team members discuss their objectives, assess ideas, make decisions, and work towards their targets together.

Professional practice in schools and colleges is widely acknowledged to be a collaborative activity. Ideas which are currently informing continuing professional development in schools; such as School Based Management Committee (SBMC) in Nigeria of recent, which connote communities involvement in the development of

school. This requires group learning for staff and students professional development which are rooted under the concept of collaborative activity. This was confirmed by Connolly and James, (2000) that professional work in schools can never be only individual but must be organizational.

3. Types of Teams within the school setting

Teams are not all alike when it comes to their design or their demands on team members. To make things a bit more complicated, not every “team” is really a team and some groups that are called by other names occasionally do phenomenal teamwork (Harvard Business School, 2002).

There are numerous types of team within an educational setting. Each suited to fulfilling particular tasks. Educational managers and team leaders need to understand each characteristics of each type which will assist them in the expected relationships among group members, likewise assist them in matching the objectives and goals of all the various teams to the most appropriate style of team.

4. Formal Teams

Formal teams are fundamental to an organization. They are often permanent, carry out repetitive work, and have a defined remit. Subsumed under this are the following:

Task/functional teams;

These are teams brought together for the purpose of transforming certain inputs (raw – materials, ideas, objects) into a distinguishable output within the school settings. e.g the teaching force in the school. These group members usually interact with one another on a daily basis, and they are often organized into departments or work teams to facilitate accomplishment of organizational objectives.

Like other organizations, educational organizations have some activities requiring group cooperation across functional lines. (e.g. an inter departmental planning committee). After the completion of project, team members return to their routine work activities or go to another temporary project group. Examples of project teams within the school setting are the Examination Committee, Building Committee Disciplinary Committee and so on.

5. Informal Teams

This implies casual groupings of people within the school system so as to work on informal basis. Informal teams can be formed on an adhoc basis to deal with many needs. This type of team arises spontaneously as people associate with one another. An example of informal teams within the school setting is the Task force teams (e.g., punctuality committee. Time – tabling committee and so on); they come together to solve a particular problem or explore a particular opportunity.

6. Features of an effective work team

Robert and Hindle (1998) stated that all successful teams demonstrate the same fundamental features:

A) Strong and effective leadership;

With strong and effective leader within the team, supportive environment is built and this help the group take the first necessary steps towards teamwork, and these steps become the basis for further steps towards cooperation, trust, and compatibility (Keith, 1980). Studies show that the greater the trust and compatibility in a team, the greater their effectiveness tends to be; there the need for a strong and effective leader to manage the team effectively. A team leader needs to be both facilitator and inspirer; he must be able to provide teams' member with all necessary support for goal attainment.

B) The establishment of precise objectives.

For teams to be productive there is need to established precise objectives of their coming together as a group. Education managers need to educate members of the team to have a better understanding of why they are in the group, and why others are not. They need to know how they can contribute to the work of the team, and they need to believe that the team can accomplish something worthwhile.

C) Making informal decisions.

This is when decisions taking within the group do not take the formal way. Every members of the team collaborate, deliberate on issues before agreeing on what next line of action should be. This promotes sense of belonging which further reinforce team's commitment and dedication.

D) Communicating freely.

Strong communication links are vital to the well-being of a team. Communicating freely is the key to keep a team productive and functioning smoothly. You can get the best out of a team if there is an established routine of dialogue, welcoming open discussion of ideas among team members and if an idea needs to be discounted, this has to be done with tact, and always give valid reasons for the rejection.

E) Mastering the requisite skills and techniques to fulfill the project in hand;

As the assigned project or task proceeds, the range of skills needed within the team can change. For example, some specialist skills that were vital at the onset of a team's life may be superfluous as the project develops. To maintain the right balance of complementary skills, a team leader must be able to recognize any changes in project or team needs and act accordingly. This ability is as important in team leaders as their ability to evaluate the technical and analytical skills of potential team members.

F) Providing clear targets for the team to work towards;

All team members need to agree on a precise definition of what they are working towards. Goals should not be set until all possible approaches to the task have been discussed. An initial series of meetings in which members can get to know each other and work towards a consensus about the goals of the team is necessary. In addition the task the team has been assigned and the issues it will address should be fully understood by everyone, and all options available in going about the task must

be assessed before deciding how the team will be organized. Finally discuss and decide on achievable deadlines for all the elements of the project.

G) Finding the right balance of people prepared to work together for the common good.

This implies looking for team members who possess one of the three major types of skills that are vital for the success of the team's task. These are: Technical expertise in disciplines; Problem – solving skills and the ability to make clear, informed decisions; Team working skills and an ability to cope well with interpersonal relationships.

H) Understanding Team's developmental stages

In effective management of the team and as part of the features of an effective work teams is for all teams members and the educational managers to understand the developmental stages of teams in which is part of what makes team productive. These stages have been described as having five stages: (Judith et al, 1990); they are as follows:

Orientation (Forming)

Redefinition (Storming)

Coordination (norming)

Formalisation (Performing)

Separation

Orientation (Forming) – occurs when teams first come together and views the task and determine acceptable interpersonal behaviors (process). The objectives of the team are not clear at this stage; team members may be suspicious, uneasy and unsure about their task and each other. Some people may be enthusiastic but others will be cautious, hence discovery of acceptable behaviours.

Redefinition (Storming) - occurs when teams starts to get to work and redefining the task. Members try to agree on its objectives and strategy, and develop group structure. At this stage conflict may result because disunity may set in, in attempting to identify methods, time to be devoted to the task, the priority they are to assign in accomplishing the task. The sharper these differences, the greater the intragroup conflict that results.

Coordination (Norming)-During coordination stage, the group collects information and interprets it in order to facilitate the accomplishment of group goals. The performance of the team is questioned and its goals are more clearly defined, procedures and leadership are discussed, ways of working together are established based on discussion about the nature of the task, different emotional responses to it, alternatives , and possible action then occur. Members resolve their differences after an open exchange of relevant interpretations and opinions and begin to act as group. Often groups do not reach this stage, and such group get disintegrates.

Formalization (Performing) - occur when the team becomes more effective because final choice of task activities and their implementation occur. Goals and roles become clear, strengths are built upon and weaknesses are resolved, commitment and involvement increase. The team becomes really effective. Results are achieved in a flexible and open atmosphere, boundaries are managed and acceptable risk – taking is encouraged. There is evidence of pride, excitement, learning and achievement.

Separation (Mourning) – occurs when team decided to break away after the successful completion of their task. Fear (1991) found that preparing for and handling the reality of the group's dearth was an important issue for people committed to the group. The attainment of successes within the team makes this stage not welcome by team's members because they find it difficult to break away.

7. Dynamics of Collaboration

Collaboration is defined as a fluid process through which a group of diverse and autonomous actors undertakes a joint initiative, addresses showed concerns or otherwise achieve common goals (Rosenthal, 1998 and Stephen, 2003). This calls for high consideration of factors that can actually reinforce effective collaboration within teams for a better productive team.

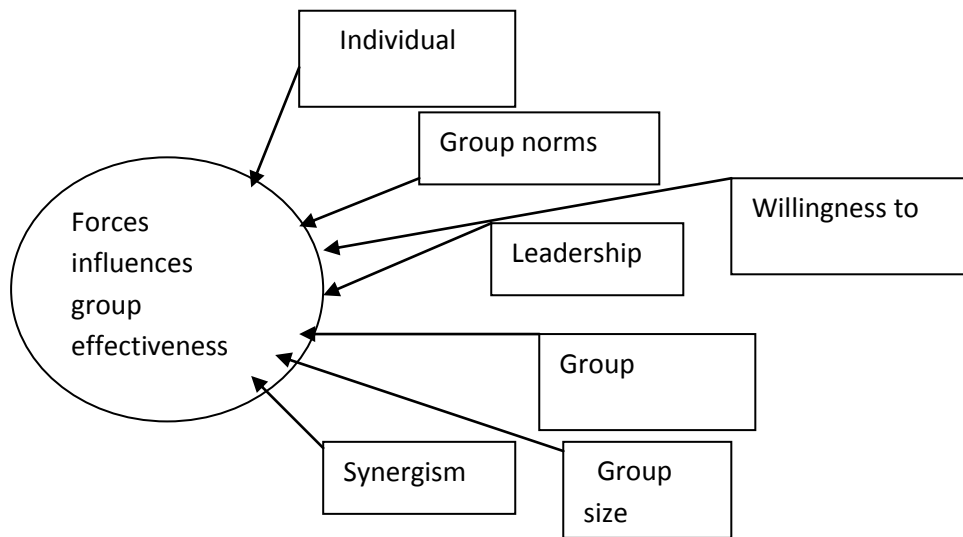
Movement through each of the identified stages of team development requires better understanding of collaboration dynamics. This gives educational managers ample opportunity to influencing the speed with which group or teams move through each stages. Some groups remain at one stage and they fail to resolve the issue associated with it. In a normal functioning groups, the orientation stage is the shortest, followed in length by the redefinition and formalization stages; the coordination stage becomes a sensitive stage because group experiencing difficulties tend to have an elongated formation state at this stage (Bridges and Husbands, 1996). Failure to move beyond any identified stage signals group's lack of conflict – resolution mechanism; depicting their inability to collaborate.

A range of factors lead to successful collaborative working of teams and it is clear that successful collaboration is thus neither simple nor straight forward. Mattessieh and Mansey (1992) identify sit key factors the environment, within which a history of collaboration and a favourable political and/or social climate are key dimensions; membership characteristics; process and structural issues; communication; purpose; and resources. They consider that members of the collaborating group should have mutual respect and trust and be able to compromise while seeing collaboration as being in their aim interest. Members should share both in the way the group works and the results of its worker. In addition, every level within each organizations that is part of the collaborative group, needs to participate in decision-making. The collaborative group should be clear about roles, but be flexible and adoptable.

There should be open and fluent communication, which should operate formally and informally.

Educational Manager needs to be aware of forces that reinforce group effectiveness before making acceptable progress in team building within the school setting. Effective collaboration of group members can therefore be sub score under Fig 1. Illustrated below:

Figure 1:



7.1 Individual Roles:

In achieving group effectiveness, there is need for role classification of all group members; this describes the actual behaviours of all members. In the collaborative process, pattern of roles exchange from each group member, this need to be diagnosed and this serve as a form of evaluation of group functioning and effectiveness. The above implies the need to diagnose individual or self parented roles from task roles and group – building roles. By so doing a collaborative effort of the team will be sustained (Hudson, Henwood & Wistrow, 1999).

7.2 Group Norms:-

Norms are unwritten expectations develop through interaction of group members. It is a standard of behaviour expected of informal group members. (Akinsolu, 2002). Generally these expectations are in line with group goals, which in turn are helpful in accomplishing organizational goals. Group members may act to encourage certain behaviours for example by reinforcing a specific level of production. Members may also discourage certain behaviours by responding negatively to their occurrence.

7.3 Leadership

An individual filling a particular management position within a team is designated a leader. In reinforcing effective collaboration of team members, team leader need strong personality traits to assert influence and function.

A team leader needs to be both facilitator and inspirer – organizational team depends upon its leader to provide it with the facility to make decisions and the support to grow. School Managers need to perform the following leadership function to ensure that team goals are achieved in schools.

Planning roles to be filled and selecting appropriate individuals;

Leading the team in meetings, starting with a discussion of team objectives and values;

Ensuring that targets are met and that values – above all, the values of working collectively – are observed by the team;

Analyzing and correcting failures swiftly and surely but always remembering to celebrate the successes just as enthusiastically

Carrying the responsibility of representing the team loyally to others, both inside and outside the organization.

7.4 Group Cohesiveness:-

The degree of attraction that the group has for each of its members is referred to as cohesiveness. Group cohesiveness is a vital force that reinforces effective collaboration among team members. It is identified by attitudes such as loyalty to the group, friendliness, and congeniality, a feeling of responsibility for group effort and defense against outside attack. Group cohesiveness enables team members in assisting the organization in increasing productivity (Gobor,1986, and Anne Dunellen,1996).

According to them some factors that affect the degree of cohesiveness of group members must not be handled with levity. Factors such as, degree of threat (to physical or emotional security); frequency of contact; degree of heterogeneity; satisfaction of members' need and the size of the group. All these factors determine the extent of collaboration among team members within the educational setting.

7.5 Team size:

This is another factor that accounts for variations in team's collaborative process. Educational managers need to be aware of the appropriate team size require in making teams within the system productive. (Weisbord, 1987) suggested the following team's size;

When quality of a complete group decision is important the use of seven to twelve members under a formal leader is most appropriate.

When consensus in a conflict situation is important, the use of three to five members with no formal leader will ensure that each member's view will be discussed.

When both quality and consensus are important, five to seven members seems most appropriate.

Harvard Business School (2002) listed some tips for establishing team size. According to them, Managers need to use a small team (five to nine members) when tasks are complete and require specific skills. They opined that for large teams; members should not exceed 25 people and using large teams should be when the tasks to be accomplished are fairly simple and straight forward.

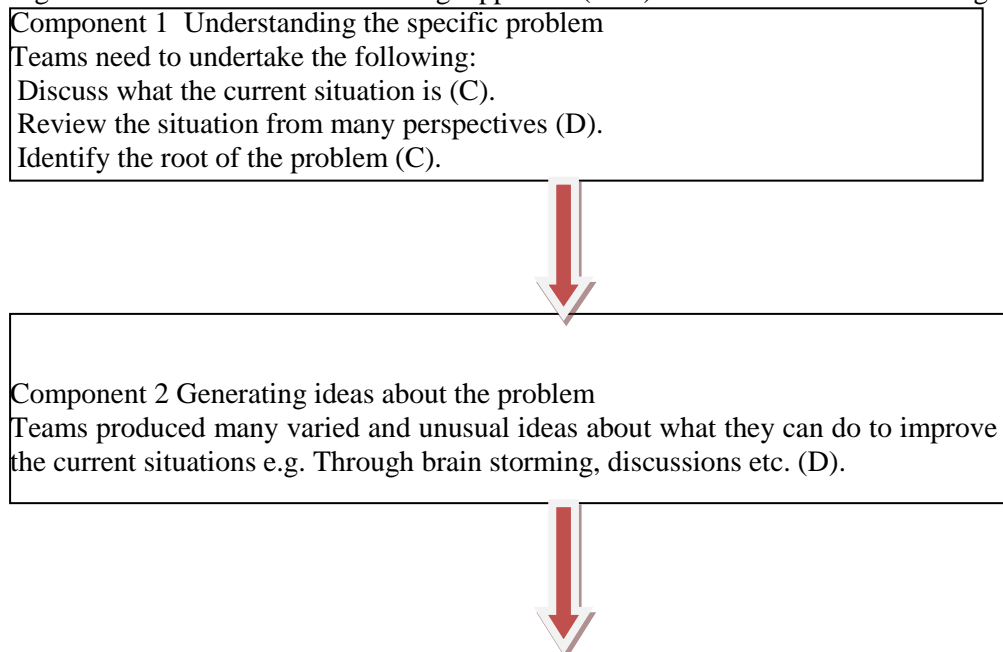
7.6 Synergism:

This is the cooperative action of people working together to accomplish more than they could working separately. This is brought about when Managers integrates multi skilled, highly skilled, highly motivated employees and computer driven technology to work as a team. This implies acquiring the right mix of experience in a team, this actually reinforce effective collaboration and thus makes team to be effective.

8. Framework for effective collaboration in handling school problems by Team's members

The setting up of committees, teams within the school system helps a lot in improving pupil achievement and school performance. Schools and teachers independently of government policies have sought to collaborate for a variety of reasons. The competitive nature exhibited within the education sector calls for school to collaborate in improving efficiency. A framework for effective use of collaboration in addressing specific educational problem in making schools more efficient thereby minimizing educational wastage is illustrated below:

Fig 2. Collaborative Problem Solving Approach (CPS) for effective Team Building



Component 3 Agreeing solutions and planning Action.
 Develop criteria for selecting the most promising possibilities from ideas generated (D).
 Apply the agreed criteria and choose the most promising solution (C).
 Form a plan of action to implement the situation (C).

Adapted from Leading the Learning School, MOE, Bostwana

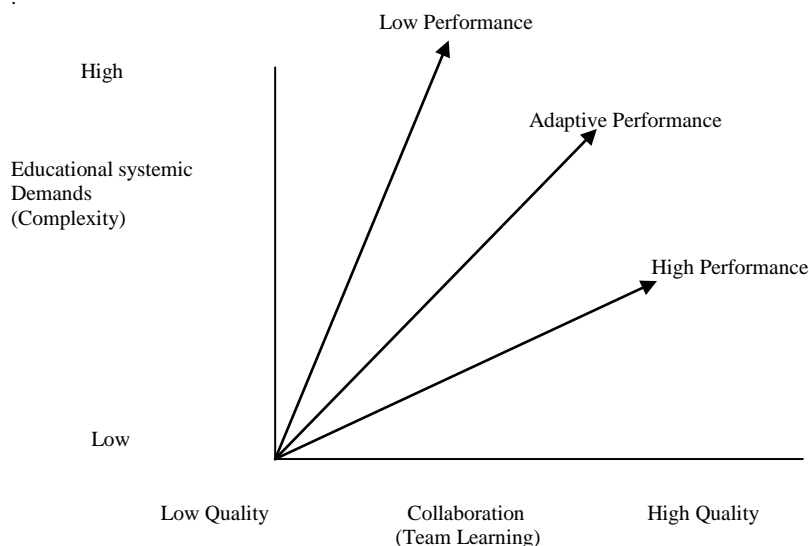
From this figure 2, each of the components has a number of stages during collaboration. We have the divergent (D) and Convergent (C) thinking. The combination of these imaginative insights resulting from the divergent thinking with the critical evaluation of options and rational decision – making of convergent thinking of group members makes problem – solving within the educational setting becomes potentially more effective.

This collaborative approach helps in handling some institutional problems in schools such as, truancy, examination mal- practices, sexual harassment, pilfering, and cultism and so on. This helps the educational system to become more efficient and thereby minimizing educational wastage.

Relatedness of the Educational Systemic Demands on School Teams Collaboration

Brett Richards (2003), asserted that the teams can be viewed as a sub system of a much wider organizational network, which is in turn, affected by even broader systemic levels beyond the borders of the organization. In his model, he explained how the systemic demands dictate the dynamics of collaboration of team’s members. Based on this he concluded that team dynamics often represent a microcosm of similar dynamics at play within the larger organization. This implies that the educational system dictates the pace by which school teams can collaborate and work effectively.

Fig. 3



Adapted from Brett, 2003. In http://www.danielpenn.com/articles/article-intelligent_teams.

Low performance: – indicates that the rate of change and complexity of the educational system is accelerating at a faster rate than the schools' team's ability (or willingness) to learn and collaborate. Under such conditions, the team becomes unable to sustain the necessary levels of performance to achieve desired results. In organizations, the pressure is usually increased due to externally imposed time compression, where the team is forced to respond with equal or higher levels of quality and results in less time. The cognitive and emotional pressure on individual team members becomes too great and the team's collaborative dynamic breaks down.

Adaptive performance: – indicates a circumstance where the team's rate of learning is keeping pace with the current rate of change in the educational environment. The watch out at this level of learning and collaboration is that if a crisis emerges or there is an unanticipated onslaught of change, it could throw the school team into chaos, moving it back towards low performance.

High Performance: Indicates an optimal rate of team learning and collaborative ability. The systemic demand is low while the team learning is accelerating faster. This is so because educational leaders anticipate potentially threatening circumstances and make great efforts to provide appropriate information, knowledge, tools and skills to ensure sustained high performance.

9. Summary and Conclusion:

Working with teams, whether as leader of a single team or manager of several, is an essential part of a manager's remit. Team working is rapidly becoming the preferred practice within the educational organizations because the success of educational organization in recent times rest solely on team building. Working as a team facilitates better understanding of the mission and objectives of the school system therefore helps greatly in achieving excellence hence it is seen as an antidote for organizational efficiency with its benefits outweighing the traditional corporate hierarchies' way of managing organizations.

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