

Leadership Briefs ... Creating High Performance Management Teams (Email News Brief – February, 2004)

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Jim Roberts is frustrated. He is a member of the management team of the U.S. division of a 4,000 person global technology company based in Brussels. He is frustrated because the team always seems to get stuck and doesn't act quickly when they have an opportunity to improve the operation they are responsible for. There are 8 members of their team along with the division's general manager. We asked Jim where he believes the team loses its ability to take action. He said that there are different personalities represented on the team and that they very seldom come to agreement on how to best respond to new areas of business that could significantly increase the division's growth. Jim believes that the team is limited by two people in particular. They are divisive and inhibit the team from functioning effectively together. The general manager tries to appease both in order to reduce the possibility of conflict on the team... and this is when the team gets stuck. A lot of attention is given to the two, both of whom are good performers and manage their aspect of the division's affairs in exemplary fashion. After Jim explained the situation, he turned to us and asked "What would you recommend to help us get on track?"

Jim's intuitive understanding of the group's dynamics and his ability to communicate his frustrations make it possible to change the situation. A problem with many teams is that they stay in denial about their poor team performance and as a result do not address important issues. This is particularly important for management teams as they are critical to the success of an organization. They "role model" effective teamwork to the rest of the organization. We told Jim that his continuous frustration is a "Red Flag". When work on a team is burdensome and every task seems to be a major undertaking then believe your professional gut that something is wrong. The team needs to stop and honestly reflect and discuss what is going on.

So, our first recommendation to Jim is to have an honest conversation with the general manager. It has been our experience that this person wants to hear from team members and wants to improve the situation. However, many times they will not know how, nor will they have the time to put into designing a process to address the situation. It is difficult organizationally for a person in the leadership position to facilitate an open discussion and resolution to the problem. We find that the sponsor - agent - target model coming out of Daryl R. Conner's work (see his book, [Managing at the Speed of Change](#)) facilitates change. The organization's leader represents the sponsor, the agent is a third party facilitator and the target is the management team. The general manager "sponsors" the team's improvement and based upon this sponsorship, the facilitator designs and implements a process that develops open and honest conversations that leads to trust and improvement on the management team. Some steps we recommend to Jim include ...

- ◆ Agree on a process with the general manager. The general manager sponsors a team improvement process. The facilitator starts by interviewing members of the team. The facilitator also acts as a coach to the general manager in support of the improvement process.
- ◆ An offsite meeting is planned with the team. The general manager kicks off the meeting and reviews what he sees to be the purpose of the management team relative to organizational objectives. He then reviews current goals and related team roles and responsibilities to make it happen. Finally, he highlights team performance and underscores that a high performance management team is critical to the success of the organization. The Drexler-Sibbet Team Performance Model (refer to the reference on the "team" page at www.northeasternconsulting.com) is a good model to follow when describing the key ingredients of a high performing team. (The Drexler-Sibbet assessment and feedback report can also be used as the basis for group data to be presented during the meeting). The

facilitator then presents the interview data by theme and validates it in a conversation with team members. The team is then broken up into three groups of three to discuss and brainstorm improvement. Each team discusses the issues and identifies improvement activities. At the end, the plans are organized and prioritized and a single point of accountability is assigned for each priority along with a "by-when" date for completion. A follow-up meeting is planned in a month from the meeting to check-in on progress.

- ◆ At another meeting a two-by-two is instituted. The team members individually give face-to-face feedback to each other on two areas of strength and two areas of improvement. After each member meets with the other 8 members of the management team, they decide on what they will work on individually based upon all the feedback they have heard. Each management team member presents to the management team the primary improvement area they will work on over the next 6 months. They then meet with the general manager after the meeting to discuss the specifics of what they will do to address the improvement areas.
- ◆ A 360 degree feedback process is instituted. A 360 tool is developed based on the agreed competencies of the management team. The process is implemented and a report is prepared for each team member. They meet individually with a coach to talk about their report and identify the areas of strength and areas that need to be improved. They then meet individually with the general manager and develop an action plan to address the areas that need to be improved.
- ◆ Based on the feedback from several sources and his own observations, the general manager discusses with each of the two managers (identified previously) a development process that includes an executive coach to work with each of them. A coaching process is agreed to by the manager, the general manager and the coach (refer to the "3C's Coaching Model on the "People" page at www.northeasternconsulting.com). The process takes 6 to 9 months and addresses the specific improvement needs of the manager based upon interviews, 360 data and other profiles and assessments. Coaching enables long term change for the individuals and for the team. If you have ever tried to stop smoking or even to lose a few pounds, you know how difficult changing behavior can be (and these are clear cut, obvious changes). Support and clarification by an experienced executive coach is necessary to make significant changes.

The steps outlined above are some foundational steps to address obstacles and to begin to build a high performance team. We find that management teams that do what has been outlined above will be a role model for the organization, lead more effectively, be able to efficiently take on new opportunities and be in a position to outperform the competition.

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