

Transformational Leadership for Global Product Development Teams

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Abstract

The team selected for the new product development for the cross-functional organization is a pool of global and professional individuals who serve their roles and responsibilities through the virtual medium from different countries and backgrounds. The situation, team members are currently facing, is that the engineering and operations management team is not sharing enough details of the project in process and finances are still not launched, delaying the entire planning and processing of the rest of the project team. The fault lines that have been created in the project are due to ineffective leadership approaches and a lack of communication among the global virtual team. Therefore, the present study explores the effective approach from the lens of transformational leadership perspective to lead the team in achieving their end goals for completing the new product development project. Being a transformational leader, this reflective assessment provides a comprehensive analysis of how I would implement strategic decisions to address the challenges presented by the team.

Introduction

Leading a cross-functional and virtual team can be a daunting task especially when the teammates are located in different parts of the globe. Such teams comprise a group of people that is geographically distributed collaborating through technology-mediated channels of communication from different time zones and cultural backgrounds. The prime challenge for these teams is that they cannot meet in person to make complex decisions for the betterment of the project or discuss the tasks that are of strategic importance (Shaik and Makhecha, 2019). The members of the team selected for the new product development project include a male marketing professional of age 35 from the United States, a female scientist of age 40 from Sweden, a male accountant of age 23 from China, a female engineer of age 25 from India, a 39 years old male operations manager from Japan, and a female human representative of age 56 from Australia. All these team members have equivalent qualifications and experiences in their respective fields and also have been with the organization for over 2 years.

However, the team is not managed properly due to which different fault lines have been created among teammates as the individuals responsible for the engineering and operations manager of the product development are not sharing related information with enough details on time with the other

team members. The negligence results in the operations component not being ready at the right time because of the lack of communication between workers and the operations manager team as well as other individuals in the organization working at different positions. Moreover, the finances of the organization for the development of a new product are still not finalized for the initiation of the project which has created considerable confusion and strain within the organization. This reflective assessment paper aims to analyze the underlying fault lines created among the cross-functional team due to which new product development project is being compromised and delayed on engineering and operations management grounds. Building on the transformational leadership approach to lead this team, I realize that this is a challenging situation but with the right and prospective leadership approach the tension among the team members and the challenge for the organization can be resolved.

Discussion

The situation, the organization is currently facing is not uncommon in such diverse, global, and cross-functional teams but can be attributed to several factors such as communication barriers, the ambiguity of roles, lack of trust, lack of clarification about responsibilities, and lack of accountability. Team engagement is a key factor to organizational competitive advantage and success which employees in the workforce bring together through their cognitive and behavioral aspects of themselves working in the organization to complete their job roles and work towards performance. Effective communication is the heart of any successful team project but it can be challenging for a cross-functional team due to differences in time zone, language barriers, and differences in cultural structures and values (Marlow et al., 2017). This could lead the team to have misconceptions and delays in sharing information and resources. Secondly, understanding the individual roles and responsibilities of each team member is essential in a cross-functional team and if there is any ambiguity around roles, it can lead to confusion within the team.

In the present scenario, the type of conflict that exists in this cross-functional team is process conflict as members of the team perceive incompatibilities in roles, responsibilities, and schedules in task completion. In such a case, the entire team depends on each individual member to complete their tasks and when one individual member misses the deadline, every member in the team is affected. So, the conflicts result in this situation because the new product development project is not completed until all members of the team have accomplished their respective tasks (O'Neill et al., 2018). In addition, trust is an essential part of the cross-functional team to function effectively which sometimes seems difficult due to cultural differences and lack of face-to-face interactions. Lack of accountability is also a prime reason why there are fault lines among cross-functional and virtual team members as it can be challenging to hold every member of the team accountable for their actions due to less or no direct supervision (Dulebohn and Hoch, 2017).

Analysis of the Scenario

In the present daunting and unsettling situation where team members are located in different regions of the globe and are not communicating effectively, the issues and problems with the rest of the team, being a transformational leader, I would schedule a one-on-one virtual meeting to encourage engineering and operations management department to share their issues, concerns, knowledge, and expertise with the rest of the team so that they and the other members of the team could understand how their contributions fit into the larger project goals. Leading by example as a transformational leader, I would set up collaboration tools such as a shared document repository to facilitate information sharing throughout the team which will also help me to regularly check in with my teammates to address issues that arise along the way, find solutions, and monitor progress of each team member. For a project team in the virtual world, high performance is the ability that dictates how team members learn, grow, manage change, avail prospects, and foster their own as well as the organization's success.

The high performance also figures out the best level of performance effectiveness of every team member for an extended period of time in the team and organization (Obiano, 2021). Furthermore, conflicts are inevitable in any team but they can be especially challenging in globally virtual teams. To find a resolution of the conflicts that work for everyone in the team, I would create a culture being an example myself where each member of the organization can openly communicate their concerns and feedback, focus on the end goal, and be aware of the deadlines which will ensure that every member is working on the related tasks that they are best suited for. This will help prevent conflicts from escalating and identify them early on before they become bigger issues for the survival of the team, project, and organization. Thus, coordination, understanding, collaboration, conflict resolution ability, cultural diversity, language inclusivity, geographical differences, and diverse and flexible skills help a virtual team to understand why they are in a certain team, why they need to be there, and where they need to be with appropriate skills, information, and materials to influence performance effectiveness of the new product development globally virtual and cross-functional team (Ang et al., 2007).

Resolution to the Challenges Presented by the Team

The study carried out by Harry Matlay and Lynn M. Martin (2009) suggests that the change in the context of the project team environment results in numerous problems that hinder the performance of team members serving in the technology-mediated and multicultural workforce from different parts of the globe. Cross-functional teams through global mobility and technological advancements in the world of business spread their services across countries and cultures as well as beyond boundaries (Matlay and Martin, 2009). This technology-mediated business strategy connects the scope of project teams beyond the traditional collocated forms to achieve the strategic goals of the organization. Due

to rapid changes in today's business workforce such as globalization and digitization, organizations have turned towards virtual teams-based structures to stay competitive in the dynamic work environment (Burgess et al., 2013).

In this specific case, engineering and product development team members are creating tension within the work environment because they do not share enough details and information about the completion or delay of the processes. This can be especially complicated for the entire workforce because the product development team is not just related to the development personnel but the project manager, product manufacturer, sales manager, and marketing professionals are also associated with the project. This team needs to be communicated with the actual problem that their lack of communication is adversely affecting the entire team's performance and they need to be specific about what details are needed and when they are needed by the other teammates for the completion of the project. They should also be provided with adequate support to the individuals responsible by offering resources and providing training to help them improve their communication and product development.

Recommendations and Implementations

The team is diverse in terms of gender, nationality, age, professional background, and market experiences. This diversity can be leveraged under the umbrella of good leadership to bring different effective ideas and perspectives to the table. I have deciphered the entire challenge that the team process that is impacted in this scenario is communication as the members who are delaying the project are from operations management and engineering departments of the product development project as they are not sharing manufacturing details with other team members which is causing delays and tension in the project.

Integration of Transformational Leadership Approach

To intervene and improve the team's performance and competence in order to address the issue, I would use a transformational leadership approach that emphasizes inspiring and motivating individuals to work together towards a common goal for organizational progress. I would encourage open communication among individuals working in the company by creating a safe space for them to share their ideas, points of view, and thoughts which will encourage collaboration among teammates. This approach can help build respect as well as trust among members and foster a sense of shared ownership of the project. I would also address conflicts within the team and establish regular check-ins by assigning them tasks that require cross-functional expertise to ensure that everyone is on the same page which will also help prevent conflicts, arising due to cultural differences and language barriers, from escalating and negatively impacting the project. Acknowledging the cultural intelligence of each individual member of the team in an organization can significantly negate the

negative and detrimental influence of cultural misunderstandings which can help the team achieve higher levels of engagement among team members within the work environment (Erez et al., 2013). This would promote knowledge sharing, set clear goals and expectations, find common ground, recognize individual contributions, facilitate open discussions, and provide constructive feedback.

Individual Capacity and Role Being a Transformational Leader

As a transformational leader among the professional and competent team to demonstrate my leadership capacity, integrity, and competency, I would lead by example by being transparent in my communication, holding myself accountable first for the success of the project, and taking responsibility for my actions before inquiring my team members for their actions. To optimize the effectiveness of this team that is negligent in certain areas, particularly in operations management and engineering, I would ensure that every team member has a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities. I would encourage problem-solving among all team members to ensure that issues are addressed in a timely manner. I would also establish clear guidelines for team members for problem-solving to ensure that everyone is working together and contributing towards the success of the organization. I would also provide them with the necessary resources and support they need to perform their tasks effectively which would surely help create a positive work environment and encourage creativity as well as innovation. In case of a delay from the engineering and product development team, I can try having a one-to-one conversation with the members of the team to understand their perspective and the reasons for the delay so that I can identify any issues that they may be facing. In this way, I could also encourage them to communicate more openly with the rest of the team. In addition, the transformational leadership approach is best suited for cross-functional teams as this approach focuses on inspiring team members to accomplish organizational goals. By using a transformational leadership approach and focusing on these leadership functions, I believe that I can lead this team to success and major prospects.

Implementation of the Strategic Decisions

To address the potential fault lines mentioned above after the meticulous analysis of the scenario, I can consider and implement strategies such as building trust among the team, establishing accountability, clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each individual member, and establishing clear communication channels. I would clarify the roles of every teammate to ensure that every member understands what is expected of them for contributing to the organization's success. For a cross-functional team, the challenges change according to the context of the environment as the team is engaged in technology and would face distinctive challenges than traditionally working teams in their corporate business world (Carlson et al., 2017). As discussed, communication and language barriers are the potential factors that contribute to the minimized productivity in the corporation so I

would implement proper communication channels such as Zoom meetings, Google Docs for resource sharing, email, video conferencing, instant messaging, and other online as well as offline channels to achieve project milestones through the virtual mediums.

Through implementing this, cross-functional teams can bring together different skill sets, ideas, and thoughts to achieve a desired outcome and high performance. As a transformational leader who aspires to work with the prospective team by leading them from the front, I understand the fact that building trust takes time but it is essential for a leader to win the trust of their team for fostering their organizational growth. So, it is significant for any team to build trust first through open communication channels and provide feedback to each other in order to function effectively. To achieve the team's trust, I have decided to organize team-building activities and regular check-ins on their tasks. Moreover, lack of accountability on the part of team members can pose detrimental impacts on the organization's production, management, and reputation so establishing accountability within the team on an individual basis can ensure that everyone is responsible for their actions. This would also help the team understand that there are serious consequences for not meeting the set expectations and goals of the leader as well as the organization.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study is an attempt to understand how an effective leadership approach can be used in cross-functional and global virtual teams to achieve a proliferous increase in team members' engagement levels. To enhance effective communication, improve product development, and foster collaboration, organizations should focus on team membership which is high in cultural intelligence and team maturity. Facilitating cross-functional and virtual teams facilitated by appropriate technology as well as adequate use of both formal and informal communication can create an environment of trust among the engineering and operations management team as well as other members of the product development team which would create a workforce that is ultimately engaging.

The challenges in globally virtual teams fundamentally disrupt the processes and projects going on in the organization and business as usual for everyone involved, however, these challenges are the drivers for individuals and organizations to step up from their previous roles to effective strategic decisions. These challenges, on a high note, present opportunities to the individual team members so that they can reassess their qualities and adapt to newer skills in the dynamic world of work. The global and cross-functional teams can then invest in the improvement of the engagement of team members through enhancing cultural intelligence and promoting inclusivity in order to provide appropriate opportunities and prospects to build trust among team members. Hence, if the team collectively works on factors including trust, maturity, technology, and cultural intelligence, perceptions of resources can be increased towards team goals by increasing behavioral, emotional, and cognitive contributions in order to achieve higher levels of engagement.

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