

International Journal of Applied Management

Volume 2 Issue 3

Bruce H. Jackson and Susan R. Madsen

Bruce H. Jackson and Susan R. Madsen

Utah Valley State College

ISSN 1742-2590

Abstract

During the past number of decades, team structures have produced significant results for organizations. While there are any number of differences between teams (e.g., composition, motivation, and leadership), there appear to be differences between high performing teams and teams that are not. This content analysis seeks to answer the fundamental question, "What are the characteristics, features, or attributes of effectively functioning teams?" While no team is identical, the following issues represent many of the core components that seem to permeate the team literature reviewed: collaborative climate, structure and performance, diversity, attitude, commitment, and environmental strategies. This paper will also reflect on lessons from the Pygmy society, the uniqueness of process of creating high performing teams, steps to take in creating and sustaining high performance teams, and maladies and mistakes made when building these teams.

Key words: teams, high performance, team climate, team performance, team structure, diversity, team strategies, team commitment,

During the past number of decades, team structures have produced significant results for organizations (Kirkman & Rosen, 2000). Even since the 1980s, organizations have significantly increased and improved group and team structure use. By 1997, Cohen and Bailey found that organizations with greater than 100 employees utilized team structures 82 percent of the time. They also found that 68 percent of the Fortune 1000 utilized team structures of some sort, while Shulman (1996) found that 47 percent of these companies utilized teams. This increase in teams has since made major contributions by helping organizations increase efficiency, flexibility, and performance. Therefore, more organizations are beginning to utilize work groups and teams as a part of doing business (Jehns & Mannix, 2001).

In looking at external pressures, Hoerr (1986) provided one reason for the increase in team use: the Japanese. Given their successful manufacturing processes, American companies have used similar strategies and, in the process, improving performance by as much as 50 percent. Katzenbach and Smith (1993) provided four additional suggestions for why teams tend to work: 1) individuals coming together bring complimentary skills and experience that exceed any individual; 2) teams support real-time problem solving, are more flexible and responsive to changing demands with greater speed, accuracy, and awareness than individuals; 3) teams provide a unique social dimension that enhances the economic and administrative aspects of work; and 4) teams have more fun. This was echoed by Hoerr (1986) who discussed the importance of socio-technical systems (after watching the Japanese overtake American manufacturing practices) and semi-autonomous work teams who had increased performance up to 50 percent as well. It has also been hypothesized that individuals, as compared to teams, are no longer as able to deal with the complexities and pressures that are best solved using team structures (Shulman, 1996), structures that require "multiple skills, judgments, and experiences" (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993, p. 9). According to Guzzo and Dickson (1996), "ample evidence indicates that team-based forms or organizing often brings about higher levels of organizational effectiveness in comparison with traditional, bureaucratic forms" (p. 330).

While there are any number of differences between teams (e.g., composition, motivation, and leadership), there appear to be differences between high performing

teams and teams that are not. In looking at common factors of high performing teams, Shulman (1996) discussed the importance of shared norms, shared visions, shared meanings, shared responsibility, and coordination among group members. In addition, he explained that shared experiences, shared understanding, and shared ideas may also lead to high performance as well. However, while there are a few examples of common themes that may pertain to most teams, there are numerous factors that every team needs to have to be successful. According to Kirkman and Rosen (2000), these include a clear purpose, focused goals and objectives, feedback and measurement mechanisms, entrance criteria, effective communication practices, the right types of conflict, rewards and recognition, opportunities for member growth, external support, ample resources, and other crucial components that lead to team effectiveness. Overall, while there is ample evidence to suggest that no team is alike, there is also evidence to suggest that most high performing teams have certain things in common—things which help produce synergy.

While no paper can address every performance issue, it is our goal to place attention on the some of the major components of high performing teams. It is important to note, however, that we must discuss only surface structures and principles without comment on the numerous subtleties that must be sifted through to apply each component to any given team or team structure.

Purpose

This review of the literature seeks to ask the fundamental question posed by Larson and LaFasto (1989): “What are the characteristics, features, or attributes of effectively functioning teams?” (pp. 18-19). While no team is identical, the following issues represent many of the core components that seem to permeate most, if not all, the team literature reviewed:

- Collaborative climate
- Structure and performance
- Diversity
- Attitude
- Commitment
- Environmental strategies

While each component represents a discipline in itself, this content analysis represents the major aspects that need to be considered when building a high performance team of any kind. In addition to the factors already listed, this paper will also reflect on lessons from the Pygmy society, the uniqueness of process of creating high performing teams, steps to take in creating and sustaining high performance teams, and maladies and mistakes made when building these teams.

Collaborative Climate

Larson and LaFasto (1989) found that having a collaborative climate is one of the few keys to highly successful teams and it is recognized by everyone they interviewed as important. According to their research, working well together took place in two ways: 1) as structural features, which took the form of, clearly identified roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities in addition to clear lines of communication,

record keeping and documentation; and 2) an issue of climate, which depicted feelings—feelings of collaboration or more commonly feelings of trust.

In building collaboration based on trust, Larson and LaFasto (1989) suggested that trust is a combination of honesty, openness, consistency, and respect, and that it is essential for teams to stay problem-focused. When trust is present, a tremendous burden can be lifted off the team which leaves more time, energy, and ability to work on meaningful problems and solutions.

Structure and Performance

Highly effective teams must have a results-driven structure. While some teams cater to high structures, others flourish under minimal structure. It is choosing the right structure for the right team that is most critical as “there are times when an abundance of structure can be just as problematic as too little structure” (Larson & LaFasto, 1980, p. 40). As such, “the importance of structure is not in its presence or absence, nor in having structure for structure’s sake. Rather, the significance of structure lies in identifying the appropriate structure for the achievement of a specific performance objective—a configuration that does not confuse effort with results and that makes sense to the team members involved” (p. 40).

Different types of team structures include structures that best support the presenting problems. Larson & LaFasto (1989) provided an example with three types of teams: resolution teams, creative teams, and tactical teams. Each type of team had a dominant feature which was at the core of its effectiveness, and this core was where performance solutions were most helpful. Problem resolution teams often dealt with issues of trust, creative teams with autonomy, and tactical teams with clarity. While the subtle issues that each of these teams may deal with is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to recognize that the presence or absence of structure is of concern to insure overall effectiveness. In any case, Larson and LaFasto (1989) described four issues that are critical to all team structures. These include 1) clear roles and responsibilities; 2) an effective communication system; 3) monitoring individual performance and providing feedback; and 4) fact-based judgments.

In studying the impact of tools that increase structure, Guzzo and Dickson (1996) looked at computer-assisted groups and found that these groups, while excelling at decision generation, fared less well when compared to face-to-face groups, as they were better problem solvers. In either case, increased structure seemed to be of high value when trying to increase performance for the computer-assisted groups. In further review, computer-assisted groups were found to make brainstorming sessions more effective because of decreased faced-time, which led to greater idea generation. Seemingly, these types of computer-assisted tools allowed individuals to side step certain human courtesies while increasing results. In addition, there was seemingly an equalizing effect giving more individuals a chance to share ideas and concerns. Also, these structured types of tools were essential for decreasing the amount of time it took to answer questions.

In summary, while we may look at appropriate internal structures of groups, it is also important to look at the various tools that assist groups in organizing the way they interact together and produce work.

Diversity

Given the nature of today's workforce, understanding the nature of diversity and team performance is an important topic. In his review of a study on diversity and team performance, Daly (1996) stated that "diversity in and of itself is not responsible for how well a team works together" (p. 11). Instead, he described a study by DiStefano and Maznevski that showed that integration—a combination of clear communication, solving differences constructively, and generating innovative solutions—is critical for a diverse team's success. While other studies have demonstrated the value of diversity when working with cognitive, creativity-demanding tasks (Guzzo & Dickson, 1996), the authors in Daly's review revealed that even when diversity caused teams to stumble, the problems could be alleviated with minimal amounts of specialized training. Integration was found to be the most important component that led to high performance in highly diverse teams.

Daly (1996) presented three main components of diversity in more depth: 1) *effective communication*, where team members hear what is intended, recognizing that this can be difficult when working with very different cultures (e.g., the Japanese and their face saving practices during communication); 2) *collaborative conflict resolution*, where individuals are able to resolve differences without alienating one another—balancing their concern for their own goals versus the goals of others; and 3) *constructive process*, where individuals build upon others ideas rather than making their own prevail. Daly (1996) indicated that the skills necessary for superior performance in highly diverse teams can be learned.

Generally speaking, according to Guzzo and Dickson (1996), while homogenous groups were seen to perform better up front, performance crossed over after a period of time. This may suggest that while there may be an upfront cost for heterogeneous versus homogeneous groups, that diversity does benefit the team over the long-term.

Attitude

High performing teams cultivate a set of attitudes that sustain and enhance the energy, interest, and the overall experience one has within the team. After studying high performing project teams, Cowell (2000) found that these types of teams generate "enthusiasm, energy, respect, and results" sweeping aside minor inconveniences and pulling together when serious obstacles arise" (p. 11). In contrast, low performing teams get bogged down by more trivial problems—usually focused on the team itself. Thus, a continuous focus on the critical variables of performance, while cultivating empowering attitudes, is essential for teams and team participants.

Commitment

It can be said that unified commitment is one of the most clearly missing components of high performance teams. This commitment comes from the focus on clear and worthwhile goals and the relinquishing the self (or ego) for the greater purposes of the team (Larson & LaFasto, 1989).

High performance teams are not only committed to the group's goals and objectives, they are committed to one another. While work groups may be committed to a

common goal, even sacrificing their own needs for the needs of the team, truly high performing teams transcend the work relationship and begin to truly care about each individual member of the team, where the attitude becomes, “if one of us fails, we all fail” (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993, p. 66). This is why it is often critical that high performance teams spend time with each other outside of the work environment, playing together and getting to know the more intricate aspects of each player. This makes being part of a high performance team more fun.

Environmental Strategies

Weiss (2000) claimed that a manager or leader’s “primary responsibility to employees is to furnish the right tools for the job and an environment conducive to doing the job right every time” (p. 14). In support of some of the components previously, Dubickl (1991) promoted six environmental factors that support high performance. The first is *flexibility* which is keeping things flexible while minimizing unnecessary formality. This supports Peters and Waterman’s (1980) notion of simultaneous loose/tight properties. In either case, the purpose is to provide enough structure to govern behavior and action, but also enough room for individuals to be able to make individualized choices that have personal relevance. The second is *responsibility*, giving people the opportunity to be responsible by giving them opportunity to take calculated risks. Again, this type of practice promotes individual buy-in and increases motivation. Third, *clear standards* which mean setting clear standards that compel worker performance. Weiss (2002) stated that employees who are made part of the decision-making process and have clear individual and team standards, are better able to perform better on the job. The fourth is *rewards*, performance-based compensation and a bias towards praising. Again, both external and internal reward strategies are used to drive performance from numerous incentives. The fifth is *clarity*, making sure that communication is clear around procedures, expectations, and plans. The final factor is *commitment* which is a willingness to give extra and feel pride in one’s work. It is the practice of the other five factors, which also support this overall commitment to team development and performance. While each of these components are critical to build high performance teams, Katzenbach and Smith (1993) explained that the building of these types of teams requires discipline; for without discipline no team can implement and sustain high performance.

Lessons from the Pygmies

While any number of topics that contribute to highly effective teams can be summarized, De Vries (1999) discussed many of the same components that govern the life of Pygmy society. In addition to a number of philosophies and practices that resemble modern approaches to organization development, trust was found to be the key to their success as a people. While many would consider the life of Pygmies as primitive in comparison to our modern society, some may argue regarding who is the most sophisticated. It must first be noted that, within Pygmy tribes, individuals often conduct their most intimate daily activities in the midst of other families. As such deep levels of trust are formed which is a critical for families to get along—even survive in their environment.

Without any formal religious influences, Pygmy society includes a code of conduct, which resembles more modern philosophical and religious foundations. Pygmy societies forbid practices such as “killing, adultery, lying, theft, blasphemy, devil

worship, sorcery, lack of love for children, disrespect for elders and other forms of misbehavior” (De Vries, 1999, p. 67). While De Vries described the life of the Pygmy by demonstrating that, as a people, they have a generally positive outlook towards the world, a sense of independence and autonomy, and a basic egalitarian power structure. He concluded with seven important lessons for the development of high performance teams that can be derived from studying these ancient people.

In his first observation, De Vries (1999) discovered that members of Pygmy society respect and trust one another to a high degree. Because of the threatening nature of the environment, Pygmies must rely on each other to survive. In fact, as a primarily genderless society, both male and female activities with regards to hunting and providing are equally divided. This is consistent with their genderless language and other egalitarian practices. More than trust, members of Pygmy tribes respect one another. Thus, without trust and mutual respect, which take a long period of time to develop and cultivate, De Vries explained that all other behaviors become irrelevant. To Pygmy society, trust and respect are the foundation of all other behaviors.

De Vries’ (1999) second finding was that members support and protect one another. While any team will deal with conflict, effective teams are able to go to great lengths to sort out differences while maintaining self-respect. This is consistent with hating the sin but loving the sinner. Consistent with this, one can dislike a particular action or behavior, however still be able to leave one’s value and respect intact. This separation of the human doing from the human being is a critical variable for designing high performance teams.

Third, members engage in open dialogue and communication. In effective teams, as well as Pygmy tribes, open communication is a must. In such teams, everyone contributes their opinions, which leads to greater personal buy-in and ownership. In contrast to more westernized ways of communication, Pygmy tribes include others during times of fighting or conflict in order to put problems out in the open so that they are easily analyzed and dealt with. Keys to open dialogue and communication also include open dialogue, frankness, and open and honest information. To boost discussions diversions and humor are often used by the Pygmy tribes to facilitate open communication (De Vries, 1999).

Fourth, De Vries (1999) found that members share common goals. Like any individual group, or organizational entity, each of us is seeking after specific goals. This does not elude Pygmy society. And, as each Pygmy needs the other to help in the hunt, we also need others to assist in the goals of the team. Goals help shape focus as well as coordinating the activities of a team. Without shared goals, individuals work in isolation and do not take advantage of communal activities that serve the group as a whole.

Fifth, members have strong shared values and beliefs. Like any organization, Pygmy tribes share strong values and beliefs, thus governing the attitudes and norms, which act as a control mechanism for behaviors. While Pygmy society may be seen as chaotic, an underlying informal order, passed down orally and known by all, creates a sense of order within the community. Since all adults contribute to the development of the children, all are involved in the transfer of rules, attitudes, social expectations, and the collective wisdom of Pygmy society—a wisdom that has been passed down through the generations in order to assist in the training and development of their youth and to perpetuate the culture and norms which have governed Pygmy society for thousands of years (De Vries, 1999). To perpetuate the shared norms, values, and culture, both rewards and punishments are used to modify behavior. However, when grievous infractions occur, the matter is left to the supernatural, or the Molimo,

a group within the community that punishes an individual, often by attacking their hut or the individuals themselves. The Molimo is an important part of Pygmy society and represents the collective conscious of the group. While discussing the values of the Pygmy society (sharing, cooperation, independence, and peace) among group members, De Vries (1999) stated that “any organization or smaller work team needs to articulate its core values and beliefs and define appropriate attitudes and behavior for its members” (p. 73). As such, organizations that wish enhance this bonding process must carefully choose individuals whose values and beliefs are consistent with the already established beliefs of the group.

Six, members subordinate their own objectives to those of the team. In Pygmy society and within organizations, members must see the needs of the group as being greater than their own. Because teamwork is an intricate balancing act, it is mission critical that individuals are focused on the collective wellness of the work group or team instead of one’s own interests. For organizations as well as primitive societies, this focus creates a type of synergy that benefits everyone who participates and contributes to the group as a whole (De Vries, 1999).

Seven, members subscribe to “distributed” leadership. Unlike Western society where traditionally a small number of individuals assert their leadership, Pygmies spread this responsibility around. As an egalitarian society, the Pygmy’s practice what has become a common practice with regards to distributive leadership where many if not all members take part in the decision-making process.

Lastly, De Vries’ (1999) explained that it is important to remember that, while Pygmy societies remain closed to the outside world, organizations, work group and teams, must take the additional steps to understand the deal with the greater contexts of their working world. Instead of being in a closed system like the Pygmies, all work groups and teams need to be seen as participating within open systems and affected by external forces. It must be said that awareness of these outside forces is essential for the survival of any team.

Creating and Sustaining High Performing Teams

While each of the areas previously discussed may contribute to high performing teams, (including Guzzo & Dickson’s (1996) assertion that high performance teams come from team cohesiveness, team composition, leadership, motivation, and group goals) it must be remembered that creating such a team is a unique process based upon unique mission, vision, and values of a given team. In describing a process for developing high performance management teams, “each organization must identify the characteristics that contribute to superior performance of its management teams and then evaluate and nurture these teams according to the appropriate model” (Dubnicki, 1991, p. 20). This approach is not dissimilar for any organization looking for the ingredients necessary to build a high performing team. However, it is self-evident that any process or practice used for building a high-performance team must take into consideration a team’s unique characteristics.

While some individuals claim that high performance teams are where one finds them, not where one wishes they were (Katzenbach & Smith. 1993), there are many things that can be done to help facilitate team development and performance. Like a pre-established route to climb Mount Everest, there are steps and stages to building high performance teams (Regan, 1999). Katzenbach & Smith (1993) established a few questions that each team can ask itself to assess its ability to develop into a high

performing team. Is the group small enough in number? Do individuals have each of the skills necessary (technical, problem solving, interpersonal) to succeed? Is there a broad and meaningful purpose? Is there a broad group of performance goals agreed to by all? Is the working approach clearly understood? Does each member hold him or herself mutually accountable? (p. 62).

In looking at common approaches to building team performance, Katzenbach and Smith (1993) described certain critical practices that have led to high performance. First, these practices include establishing urgency and a direction, recognizing that the more urgent and the clearer the expectations, the more probably there will be for reaching high performance. Second, teams must select individuals based on skills and skill potential. Third, they must pay attention to first meetings and actions to see how team members and leaders react to one another. Fourth, clear rules of behavior must be agreed upon. Fifth, mini goals and victories must be provided to help the team establish sense of early confidence. Sixth, teams looking to become high performing teams must be given new and fresh challenges followed by fresh facts and information. Seven, they need to spend much time together, thus transcending just the working relationship. Guzzo and Dickson (1996) warned, however, that individuals too familiar with one another can be more prone to accidents or risky behavior. Finally, teams need a plethora of positive feedback, recognition, and rewards for their diligent work and efforts. While these are suggestions, we contend, as did Guzzo and Dickson (1996), that “each team must find its own path to its own unique performance challenge” (p. 128), and thus it is a journey that each team must attempt on their own.

Guzzo & Dickson (1996) discussed three points of leverage for helping teams perform better. The first relates to the design of the group (i.e., specification of membership, roles and coordination, and goals). A second leverage point included group process, indicating that group cohesiveness as well as structured processes (i.e., computer mediated decision making or other formalized techniques such as using the stepladder technique) can assist groups in reaching higher levels of performance. A third leverage point discussed the importance of team context, recognizing that when the context changes these changes can have a dramatic impact on the teams themselves. This can be found in both the micro environments (cockpit crews) to macro-environments (whole organizational change interventions). Guzzo and Dickson (1996) stated that “it is probably most justifiable to conclude that the greatest changes in team effectiveness are most likely to be realized when changes in teams’ organizational context are supported by the appropriate team design and process” (p. 335).

On the other hand, Dubnicki (1991) contended that the process of developing a high performance team begins by pinpointing specific behaviors and then looking for individuals who meet these criteria. To do this we must study high performing teams in action, interview them both as a team and as individuals, and ask specific questions about what key things led them to becoming a high performance team. While any number of processes and techniques may help teams perform well, Dubnicki supported the notion that the formula for reaching higher levels of performance is a unique process for each organization. However, while studying high performance teams in the healthcare industry, Dubnicki (1991) stated that team contributors must first begin with clearly defined roles based upon the top ten critical competencies for each role. This is followed by positive relationship building within and outside the group, recognizing, of course, the critical components that serve a specific team’s needs (i.e., for industries such as in advertising, creative conflict would be an essential skill while for police officers, trust and responsiveness would be an essential skill).

In searching for ways to improve and sustain performance, much can be learned from implementing TQM programs—programs that include clear standards and quality improvement goals (Weiss, 2000). These goals are often supported by the measurement of both quantitative and qualitative results. Balanced Scorecard systems (Coonradt, 1984; Kaplan & Norton 1996) and/or checklist systems (Weiss, 2000) can be used as critical feedback to insure teams are meeting the needs of their internal and external clients while maximizing strengths and working on weaknesses. Additionally, individuals seeking to increase one's performance should consider taking additional problem solving roles to show one's dedication and willingness to serve.

In building high performance teams, it must be noted also that no team lasts forever; in fact, a specific life cycle can often dictate the time frame for any highly performing group. It is, therefore, important to recognize that while it is often useful to rotate positions and even bring in new talent to renew team energy that even the best of teams come to an end.

Maladies and Mistakes When Building High Performance Teams

Cowell (2000) and others have purported that leaders often make three key mistakes when building teams. The first relates to team size; in many cases teams are often too large (most teams should not exceed four to seven individuals or the number of relationships becomes unmanageable). This takes place because team leaders often invite anybody who wishes to participate. It is important to remember that groups that get too large can fall prey to unwieldiness and even to free-rider syndrome where individuals feed off the group rather than contribute to its success (Rainey, 1991).

Another issue related to group size is “groupthink” (Janis, 1972), a term that has been used to describe teams who make poor decisions because of certain dynamics. Aronson, Wilson, and Akert (1999) described the components of groupthink. The antecedents of groupthink take place when a group is highly cohesive, often isolated, contains a directive leader, is under high stress, and when there are poor decision-making procedures. The symptoms are then discussed, these include an illusion of invulnerability, belief in the moral correctness of the group, stereotyped views of the out-group or opposing sides, self-censorship—where contrary opinions are held at bay, direct pressure on dissenters to perform, an illusion of unanimity, and mind guards—members who protect the leader from contrary viewpoints. These lead to defective decision-making which include incomplete survey of the alternatives, a failure to examine risks, poor information search, and a failure to develop contingency plans (Janis, 1972). Some groups have been known to make risky decisions because of groupthink. A classic case was the Bay of Pigs disaster that took place under the Kennedy Administration. While working with some of the finest minds in the world, grave errors were made with regards to the actions to be taken. Kennedy later recognized what contributed to these issues and made changes in the way his committee communicated together (Aronson et al., 1999; Rainey, 1991).

A second major mistake is choosing the wrong people altogether. To build high performance teams, team leaders must choose carefully, often using tools that help better identify the right people for the right teams and positions. While screening instruments can be quite helpful, they do not guarantee team member success, as many issues arise once teams have been formed. It is also important to be wary of

four types of individuals. First are what Larson and LaFasto (1989) termed, *irritating experts*, who are individuals who showcase themselves instead of collaborating with others. This was consistent with Larson and LaFasto's (1989) research that found that intense collaboration within a group was associated with high performance in contrast to individual agendas that led to lower performance. Another type of individual to be wary of are *outspoken dimwits*. These are individuals who have little to say, but do so anyway. Third, entrenched *incumbents* who defend old decisions and protecting their jobs. The fourth category includes *flyweights* who are sent in the place of the individual who must truly make the decisions.

In addition to these types of individuals, team members must also be chosen based upon the attitudes and energies they bring to a group. In discussing this Regan (1999) referred to individuals who negatively influence a group as *dark-siders*. As such, teams who wish to be high performing should be cognizant of such individuals and make sure that they are not allowed to negatively influence the team.

Dubnicki (1991), after studying the healthcare industry, described other types of dysfunctional teams members: individuals who espouse an "all for one and one for all" philosophy, but instead are playing the internal games; team leaders who lack certain critical skills and thus affect morale and performance; individuals who lack of critical process skills (i.e., running meetings, group problems solving, strategic and tactical planning) that keep them from facilitating team performance; team members who are highly competent but their leader lacks skills to provide vision and direction; and individuals who hold overlapping roles and responsibilities which can lead to an inconsistent vision.

The third major mistake is when there is a failure to make a clear and complete charter. Often time's teams come together with a lack of a clear goal or focus. To remedy this situation, high performance teams should create a charter that clearly defines the work to be done, resources available, and expected outcomes (Larson & LaFasto, 1989).

In addition to these internal issues, according to Larson and LaFasto (1989), all teams must take into consideration external sources of interference. While any number of internal issues may arise, teams must also pay close attention to the external factors, which can derail team performance. Essential then are key sources of external support that can support team objectives.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Much has been learned since the Hawthorne studies gave rise to the importance of how work groups affect the behavior of employees (Rainey, 1991). Since then, numerous studies now demonstrate the value of attending to work groups and their effect on overall organizational performance. Further, Gephart (1995) found that high performing teams decrease the need for management and raise the level of performance for lesser performing teams (Rainey, 1991) while increasing organizational performance in general (Gephart, 1995).

Teams have been found to offer not only increased organizational performance, but also an increase in team member satisfaction (Hoerr, 1986)—helping members to become more valuable in the process (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). Groups have an advantage over individuals because of the availability of new ideas, talent, and viewpoints. Group decision making also promotes more understanding, acceptance, and a clearer perspective of why something is taking place (Rainey, 1991). Effective teams learn to think for themselves (Regan, 1999) and, therefore, move decision-making to the front lines where it is often needed. While taking more time at first, its value improves efficiency over time. While tremendous outcomes have resulted from high performing teams in organizations, the ultimate benefit comes in the form of individual human development. It is through this process of collective excellence that individuals become more than the “sum of their parts” and learn to work together towards goals and objectives that provide tremendous meaning, not only for the organizations who house them, but for the individuals that sacrifice for them.

The results of this content analysis suggest recommendations for practitioners. Often organizational leaders, managers, and team leaders do not understand the important factors and components regarding design, developing, and implementing high performance teams. Training, development, and educational efforts to assist practitioners in increasing their knowledge and skills in this area could result in a deeper operational understanding of concepts that have been shown to increase team productivity and performance. As we have already stated, the literature supports the premise that well-functioning teams can out perform individuals or other groups. We also recommend that members of current teams (management and non-management) also review this and other articles discussing and summarizing high performance factors so that they can more thoroughly understand team dynamics and related performance increases. The more management and non-management understand the factors of high performance teams, the better they can perform within any type of workplace team. In this competitive marketplace, high level performance at the individual, team, and organizational levels are essential to short- and long-term success.

References

- Aronson, E., Wilson, T. D. & Akert, R. (1999). *Social psychology*. New York: Longman.
- Cohen, S. G. & Bailey, D. E. (1997). What makes teams work: Group effectiveness research from the shop floor to the executive suite. *Journal of Management*, 23(3), 239-290.
- Coonradt, C. (1984). *The game of work*. Salt Lake City: Shadow Mountains.
- Cowell, J. (2000). Flawless teams. *Executive Excellence*, 17, 11.
- Daly, C. E. (1996). Teamwork: Does diversity matter? *Harvard Business Review*, 74(3), 10-11.
- De Vries, M. (1999). High performance teams: Lessons from the pygmies. *Organizational Dynamics*, 27(3), 66-77.
- Dubnickl, C. (1991, May-June). Building high performance management teams. *Healthcare Forum Journal*, 19-24.
- Gephart, M. (1995). The road to high performance. *Training & Development*, 49(6), 29-38.
- Guzzo, R. A. & Dickson, M. W. (1996). Teams in organizations: recent research on performance and effectiveness. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 47, 307-38.
- Hoerr, J., Pollock, M. A., & Whiteside, D. (1986). Management discovers the human side of automation. *Business Week*, 70-75.
- Janis, I. L. (1972). *Victims of groupthink: a psychological study of foreign policy decisions and fiascos*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Jehn, K. A. & Mannix, E. A. (2001). The dynamic nature of conflict: A longitudinal study of intragroup conflict and group performance. *Academy of Management Journal*, 44(2), 238-251.
- Kaplan, R. S. & Norton, D. P. (1996). *The balanced scorecard*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Katzenbach, J. R. & Smith, D. K. (1993). *The wisdom of teams: creating the high-performance organization*. New York: HarperBusiness.
- Kirkman, B. L. & Rosen, B. (2000). Powering up teams. *Organizational Dynamics*, 23(3), 48-66.
- Larson, C. E. & LaFasto, F. M. J. (1989). *Teamwork: what must go right, what can go wrong*. Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications.
- Peters, T. & Waterman, R. H. (1982). *In search of excellence*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers.

Rainey, H. G. (1991). *Understanding and managing public organizations*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Regan, M. D. (1999). *The journey to teams: a practical step-by-step implementation plan*. New York: Holden Press.

Shulman, A. D. (1996). Putting group information technology in its place: communication and good work group performance (pp. 357-361). *Handbook of organization studies*. In S. R. Clegg, C. Hardy & W. R. Nord. London: Sage Publications.

Weiss, W. H. (2002). Organizing for quality, productivity and job satisfaction. *SuperVision*, 63(2), 13.