

Sample Student

COMM 4223

Organizational Communication

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Teams, Team-Work, and Leading Worship

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Sunday Mornings Leading Worship

For the first portion of this paper, I will detail a typical work day as a part-time contemporary worship leader for a medium sized Pentecostal church in Tulsa, Oklahoma. If you think about it, the job of a worship leader is a bit of juxtaposition. While congregants observe the Sabbath, worship leaders are working. I call it a job, or work, but there is some hesitation to do this. There is a stigma in evangelical Christian circles when it comes to defining a certain ministry as a job. But, it would be lying to imply no work was involved.

It should come as no surprise that the busiest day for me was Sunday. Our Sunday mornings were broken up into “traditional” and “contemporary” services. The first service was at 9:00 a.m. It was defined as traditional because the worship service, or sung portion of service, consisted of hymns and older choruses. The second service began at 10:45 and was defined as contemporary because it featured modern worship choruses. I was the worship leader for the contemporary service, but I also frequently performed the offering music in the earlier traditional service. For simplicity, I will detail a day when I only had to perform in one service.

For the contemporary service, I would have my team gather at 9:00 a.m. in the choir room for pre-service rehearsal and prayer time. . For the most part, my team members came prepared to Sunday morning rehearsal. I did have problems getting my drummer to show up on time, but he was such an amazing drummer that I didn't mind that too much. Because of his value to the team (a drummer is the back bone of a worship team because he builds the dynamics – a key to a successful worship service), I never confronted him on this.

We generally practiced from 9:00 – 10:15 am. I must interject here that I organized Tuesday night rehearsals for the team and they were expected to come to Sunday morning rehearsal knowing their parts. I also communicated with the team throughout the week to organize how Sunday morning should go. I did this through email and text messages.

Generally, we would start our rehearsals by chit chatting. We would spend about 10 – 15 minutes catching up with one another (we called this fellowshiping). This really facilitated a family type atmosphere. I should mention here that I took over leading this team after the previous leader was caught in a church “scandal.” Because of this, my primary goal was to keep the team cohesive. Often in church organizations when leadership changes there is a high percentage of volunteer fall off in that area of ministry. To promote cohesiveness I wanted to make sure everyone felt like they were vital and important to the team, hence the promotion of a family atmosphere. I was very pleased to have zero fall-off during and after the transition.

After our morning rehearsal fellowship, I would offer a prayer to help focus the group on the goal(s) we wanted to accomplish that morning. Part of my job as worship

leader was to be “prayed up” and to have a direction from God as to where He wanted the music to go that morning, though; sometimes the lead pastor would contact me prior to the week’s service and give me a focus or song suggestion if he had a specific direction in mind. This didn’t happen very often, though.

I would say that 40% of my morning was spent getting the team on board with a specific vision and facilitating team cohesiveness. The other 60% of my morning was spent dealing with the practical side of leadership.

It was usually about 20 minutes into rehearsal time that we got started on the practical side of things. We would run through our set list in the order it was to be performed. I was a stickler for running through the set in order so that we could work on transitions from one song to the next. A buzz kill in a charismatic worship service is dead space (silence between songs). Because we always had a thorough practice on the previous Tuesday, we would only go through the verses, choruses, bridges (if applicable) once. This was, as I mentioned before, to focus on the transition. On the platform we might go through these components several times before moving to the next song. The run through took approximately 20 minutes. After going through the whole set and working on transitions, I would ask my team members if they had any questions regarding any part of the set or song. We would then address those one by one. I had great doing this. I delegated vocal sectionals to my lead soprano. She made sure all vocalists were aware of their parts. I also delegated guitars to my lead electric guitar player. I worked more individually with the tardy drummer and keyboard players. I did this because they were integral to our transitions running smoothly, and because I knew that my lead soprano and lead electric guitar player were great at handling their groups.

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After spiritual, emotional and musical cohesiveness were achieved, we would leave the rehearsal room at 10:15 to take the stage. We were supposed to have our sound check at 10:15; however, that seldom happened. We had to wait until the lead pastor dismissed the first service before we could set up on the stage. Usually, it was closer to 10:30 before we were able to have a proper sound check. This was never optimal, but we made it work.

I had one very big rule when it came to the sound check: If a musician or vocalist had a problem, ~~s/he was~~ to discuss it with me and then I would talk directly to the sound man over the microphone about the issue. I had to institute this rule after the first few sound checks were very disorganized with everyone giving the sound man orders, confusing him. The rule of thumb: Worship leaders want to make the sound engineer happy; otherwise he has the power to make us sound really bad. The sound engineer would set the levels for each musician and vocalist. When sound check was over, the team gathered to stage right for a quick prayer then we started the service.

I would start the service by inviting the congregation to stand up and by exhorting them with scripture. Then we would generally start with an up tempo-song, followed by two to three mid-tempo songs, and finish with a slow worship ballad. I always provided the lead pastor with my set list so he knew when to come up to the platform to take over the service. When he came up, we would play quietly while he prayed. When he said, “amen,” this was our cue exit stage right. As we exited, we gathered to congratulate one another on a job well done. Then we would all go to our respective pews and listen to the pastor’s sermon. After the message, either I or the keyboard player would go back up to play softly during the closing prayer and benediction.

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Teams and Team-Work

Research shows that more and more organizations are leaning heavily on a team based approach to meet the needs of highly competitive markets, increasing corporate globalization, and technological advances (Flannagan & Runde, 2008; Parthasarathy, 2006; Fullagar & Egleston, 2008). Research on the current business trend of forming teams to facilitate a more efficient workplace is a relatively new field of research, but grouping individuals into teams to perform tasks and complete projects is by no means a new idea. We do not have to reach far to gain historical perspective on teams. We can see team-work employed in our elementary school textbooks. For example, Christopher Columbus formed teams to discover the New World, and early civilizations “banded together to hunt game, raise families and defend their communities” (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006).

Thanks to advancements in technology the type of work that humans do has changed drastically since the inception of man, but arguably the goal remains the same: in order to live, one must eat; and in order to eat, one must work. Companies want to make that work more efficient, so they are reverting back to teamwork as a means to accomplish their goals. As a consequence, the highly individualistic jobs of the late 19th and early 20th century are being pushed out in favor of teams and team-work (Kozlowsky & Ilgen, 2006).

Team-based socialization doesn't begin when an individual enters the work place. More and more children are being socialized into groups through the public education system. They are grouped together in gym class to play kick ball. They are grouped

together according to their reading level to form reading groups. They learn how to work together for the good of the team in extracurricular activities and sports. We live in a pervasive team-based society and “it’s safe to say that most people have served, are serving, or will serve on a team during their work careers” (Flanagan & Rune, 2008).

So, what is a team? A team consists of “two or more individuals” who “socially interact (face to face or, increasingly, virtually)” (Koslowski & Ilgen, 2006), and are working toward a common set of goals. Teams are more likely to be facilitated by leaders as opposed to being managed by managers. Teams work in the broader context of the system, and the performance of the team-based organization as a whole is dependent on how effective its individual teams are (Koslowski & Ilgen, 2006; Senior, 1997).

Teams are multi-faceted and dynamic, adapting to the climate of the organization that they benefit. In this way there is a kind of interdependence within a team-based organization as “process begets structure, which in turn guides process” (Koslowski & Ilgen, 2006). There is also interdependence between the individuals on a work team. These interdependent individuals are working “toward a common goal through shared risk, reward, and accountability” (Cross, 1998). Raj Parthasarathy (1996) states that with a team approach individual bias is minimized and members learn from each other.

Research shows that individuals are more fulfilled and “derive a range of socioemotional” (Cordery, 2004) benefits from team-based work. However; it is important to remember that teams are comprised of individuals. An individual may gain benefits from identifying with the group as a whole, but their entire identity is not summed up in the collective. Therefore, the ability of the individual to succeed should not be minimized (Cross, 1998). Effective teams recognize that the individuals who

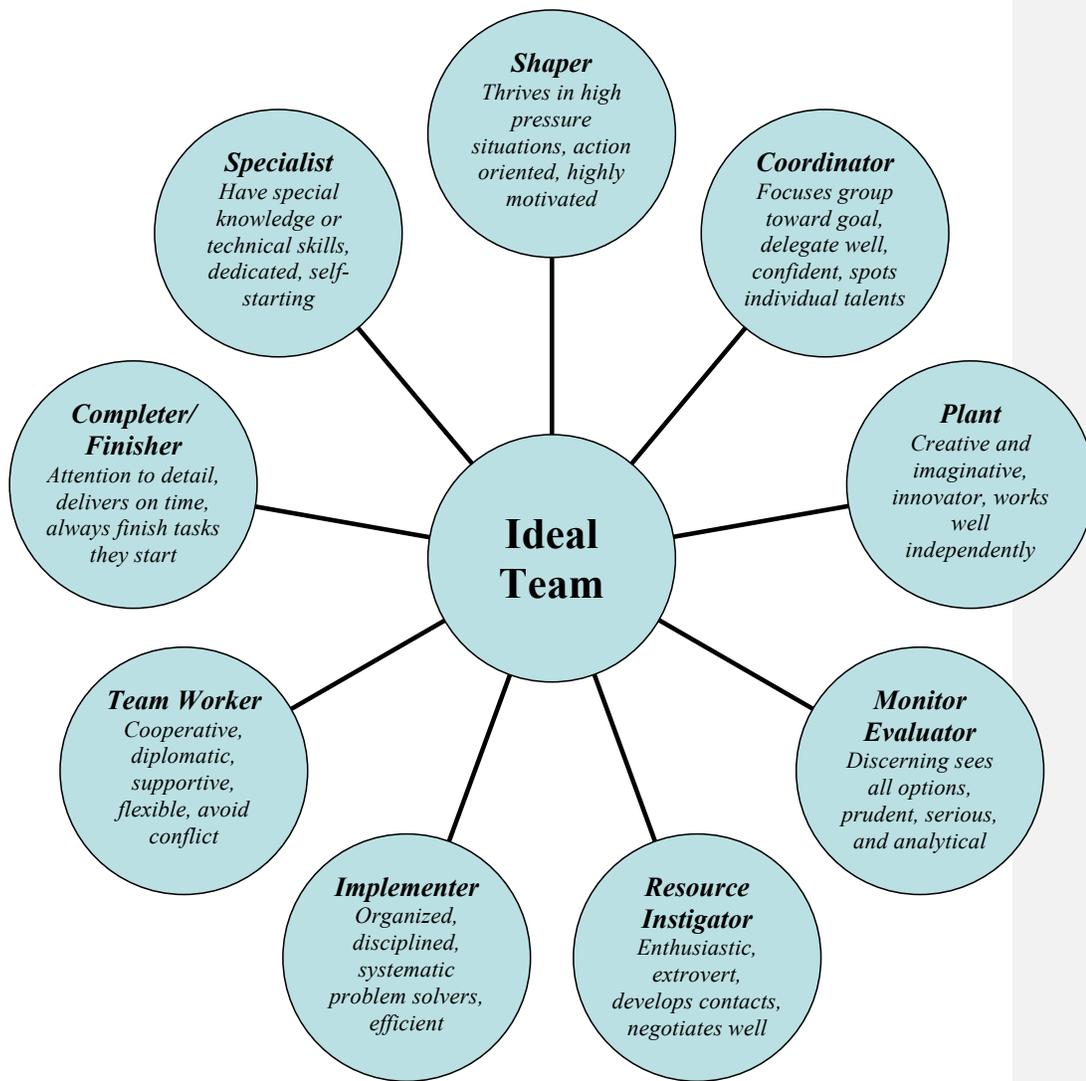
comprise a team have specific areas of expertise (Parthasarathy, 2006) and facilitate a team atmosphere where that individual is rewarded for their contribution to team as a whole. If only team rewards are implemented then individuals may burn out and their internal resources exacerbated. Individual reward schemes must be implemented as well (Parthasarathy, 2006).

Team Size and Team Roles

There is a general consensus among researchers that extremely large teams are less effective than smaller groups. But, there is some argument as to what number of team members make the most effective group. Some researchers suggest teams should be comprised of eight to twelve members (Cross, 1998) while others suggest a lower number of four, and a higher number of fifteen (Senior, 1997). Still yet, quite a few researchers look to the Belbin model of team structure to determine the ideal size of a team. Belbin suggests that nine members is the magic number for team effectiveness. (Belbin, 1981; Fisher, Hunter & Macrosson, 1998; Senior; 1997).

The Belbin Team Role Self Perception Inventory (BTRSPI) was included in the Appendix of Belbin's 1981 book on team management and effectiveness (Belbin, 1981), and has since been found to have beneficial utility in a variety of work environments (Belbin, 1993; Anderson & Sleaf, 2004). Belbin's inventory profiles nine different individual team roles how they fit within the larger context of the group. Diagram 1 details Belbin's nine roles for the ideal team.

Diagram 1. Example of Belbin's team roles in relationship to the ideal team.



*Based on Belbin's model (Belbin, 1981; Senior, 1997).

Belbin's model suggests that individuals tend naturally toward their roles and that a team needs to have an even distribution of the nine roles for optimum team performance (Senior, 1997). Though, some Belbin roles are naturally dominant in their description, Belbin stresses that different roles will take on levels of dominance depending on the stage of a team project (Senior, 1997).

It should be noted that research exists that challenges the validity of Belbin's model of a high-performing team. Researchers, Anderson and Sleaf, found that there was a gender gap when it came to self reporting on the BTRSPI (Anderson & Sleaf, 2004). Indeed there are instances of gender bias on the BTRSPI; Belbin's category of "coordinator" was initially termed "chairman," which could make it difficult for a female to identify with this specific role, and there also lies within the BTRSPI "unambiguous violations of the Four-Fifths Rule in favour of males" (Anderson & Sleaf, 2004). The study conducted by Anderson & Sleaf (2004) also found that "females were overrepresented in the 'Team Worker' type." However; it seems that if the gender issues of Belbin's model are corrected, the BTRSPI could be an effective assessment tool for team roles.

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Team Cohesiveness and Conflict Resolution

As previously mentioned, Belbin suggests that a team comprised of his nine roles increases team performance. It is important to interject here that a well-balanced team using Belbin's roles by no means guarantees a team-work utopia. With diversity being critical in team environments, conflict is inevitable. Keeping a team cohesive through conflict should be one of the goals of the team leader. The team leader should be a

thermostat and should be aware of the temperature of the team climate. Flannigan and Runde (2008) suggest that “team leaders who want to create the right climate for addressing conflict need to stay aware of the emotional temperature in their teams.” While conflict is a natural part of the team process, it is important to not allow “intra-team conflict” to oppose cohesion (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). Teams that are well equipped to handle conflict are facilitated to be open and honest, foster a sense of trust and safety, value collaboration, and understand emotional intelligence (Flannigan & Runde, 2008).

Kozlowski and Ilgen (2006) suggest that low levels of conflict serve to stimulate and energize a group while eliminating instances of group-think; conversely, they assert that in a laboratory study high levels of conflict were responsible for greater turnover rates (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). This information echoes the need for team leaders to be constantly aware of the team climate, and it highlights the need for leaders to have some knowledge of “how team members usually handle conflict” (Flannigan & Runde, 2008). It is also important for organization to have specific processes in place to deal with any intra-team conflicts that may come up.

Applying the Team-Based Approach to Leading Worship

This section will reflect my research on teams and teamwork and attempt to synthesize that research with an average day of leading worship. The team approach is highly relevant to leading worship. It is within the framework of team that worship ministry is most effective.

A worship team consists of a group of individuals, each with a unique musical skill or technical ability. The worship team is led by an appointed (volunteer or paid)

leader whose is charged with leading the congregation in the song portion of a church service, administrating and organizing all aspects of the worship team, and spiritually guiding the team (a pastoral role).

On average my worship team had eight to ten members (excluding myself), which is within the number of members some researchers suggest for optimum team performance. My team consisted of 3-5 vocalists, a piano/keyboard player, a bass guitar player, lead electric guitar player, second electric guitar player, second acoustic guitar player (I led from guitar making my guitar the lead acoustic), and a drummer. Some leaders include the sound engineer as part of their worship team. Since I was part-time, I didn't administrate the sound engineer, so I don't include him as part of the team, although, as previously mentioned, the sound engineer is a vital component to a worship team.

It is difficult to apply Belbin's roles to a worship team, but I do believe that some of the roles are applicable. As the worship leader, I operated within three roles, the shaper, coordinator, and monitor-evaluator. Every Sunday it was my job to make sure the team knew what our goal was and to focus them in that direction. It was also my job to challenge and push team members outside of their comfort zones in order to foster growth in their specialized skill. And finally, it was my job to consistently analyze the temperature of the congregation to know when I needed to change directions with our song set. Sometimes the scheduled songs were not effective at facilitating interactive worship (a hallmark of Charismatic Christian services), and we would need to change the order of the song service.

Just by Belbin's descriptions, I can see that one of my team members leaned in the same direction on the Belbin scale as I did. My vocal sectional leader was also a skilled shaper, coordinator and monitor evaluator. This caused some minor conflict between the two of us. More specifically, she was very vocal about disagreeing with the way I led vocally. Because of this conflict, I realized she was also a strong leader. I quelled her argumentativeness and validated her need for leadership by creating the position vocal sectional leader. Delegating that position, helped her exercise her leadership skills and relieved me of extra work. More often, though, most of my team members were plants, team workers, and specialists. Melancholy musicians are synonymous with Belbin's "plants." A worship team lacks emotional depth without these creative innovators.

As previously mentioned, in my three years with this group, I didn't lose one team member. I believe this is directly linked to the way I value individuality among team members. In my research portion of this paper I mention the importance of rewarding not only the team but also the individual. This was a system I employed. I wanted everyone to feel like they played a vital role in accomplishing our goal. Also as I mentioned above, Flannigan & Runde (2008) stated that a well-facilitated team is open and honest, fosters a sense of trust and safety, values collaboration, and understands emotional intelligence. This was always my goal.

Now that I've mentioned the strengths of my team, I must also mention some weaknesses. As I mentioned in the first portion of this paper, my drummer didn't like to show up on time on Sunday mornings. I never confronted him about this. This probably seemed unfair to the rest of the team. I was unwilling to confront him because he was so

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great at what he did. I didn't want to lose him as a vital team member. In hind sight, I should have confronted him. Also, when I was operating in the role of monitor-evaluator I had a tendency to not give the team enough notice when we were changing the plan. This occasionally led to confusion and frustration for them.

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In closing, the jury is still out on whether teams and team work will continue to be a vital part of the work place. Seeing as though teams and team-work have been a means of accomplishing tasks and projects since the beginning of time, I think it's safe to assume that teams in some capacity will always be a part of our lives.

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Good sources!

Interesting, well-written, and well-researched! A few points: It would help to define the position "worship leader" at the outset and not on pages 9-10. Try to have more of a cohesive introduction, and transitions between sections of the paper where they're lacking. A few minor writing issues.