

16 September 2010

Developing competent technical teams – a case study

Ecclesiastes 10 verse 10

If the axe is dull and it's edge unsharpened, more strength is needed, but skill will bring success.

In 2002 the organisation I was working for, in the Automation division decided that their best opportunity to grow would be not to enter new markets but rather to make sure that every client that is using their product should be convinced to use more than one product in fact many more.

I know this is an Engineering Manager conference and venturing in the direction that I am would be as one colleague used to say would only be preferable to sitting in a show house on a Sunday afternoon. But please bear with me as I really believe that the title of this paper will be addressed.

Abstract.

An organisation of some 56 technical people – mostly engineers- were organised in a matrix structure that meant that any one person in the structure would report to two General Managers in the first instance as project engineer, project manager etc and in the second instance as part of a front end organisation serving the needs of a strategic account.

There were 5 Key Account Managers - KAMS – and for each KAM there was a support team in fact, the support teams may change composition and serve different clients at different times

Confused?

We looked at this structure and realised that it required a skill set different to anything we have done before. The potential for disaster was huge but equally the potential for success.

FAST Forward.

At the end of the first year the company realised an order book of over 1 Billion Rand for the first time in the history of the organisation. Strategic accounts were established with two major accounts in which projects were undertaken on an Open Book or Profit sharing basis.

Interested?

Matrix Organisations are not new they are often used in projects and the life of the structure could be relatively short. We wanted this one to endure and we introduced the concept of LEADERS of LEADERS with the 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership. This was not done in a formal class room type environment it was a case of hands on training and each member of the structure was expected to show leadership in his own area of strength.

This was the one aspect but the second sharpening of the axe was with the methods coming from Malcom McDonald through his book KEY Account Management. This was also used at that time by the IMM in their certification programme.

Of particular interest was a model used by him for analysis and planning and if there were 15 variables in the model only one was regarding your own company. This was quite strange to a product driven company and the emphasis was now to go and learn as much about your strategic accounts critical success factors, key drivers and really get to understand where the needs are.

Regretably for many the SWOT analysis had to take a secondary position.

This case study would at the end of the day endorse, in my modest opinion, the writing material of Dr John C Maxwell in

The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership

The 17 Indisputable Laws of Teamwork

Of particular application and learning was :

- The Law of the Lid

Leadership determines the level of effectiveness of a Leader.

- The Law of Influence

The true measure of Leadership is influence-nothing more nothing less.

KAMS were called upon to influence at every level of both their own organisation and that of the Strategic account.

One Director could invariably only be seen on the roof of the building that housed them early in the morning when he was taking his smoke break.

Influence with the “Gate Keepers” or secretaries was crucial.

- The Law of Process

Leadership develops daily not in a day

Also view the Competency Model of Abraham Maslov to support this.

- The Law of Connection

Leaders touch a heart before they ask for a hand.

- The Law of the inner circle

Leaders potential is determined by those closest to him.

- The Law of Empowerment

Only secure leaders give up power to others.

This is a summary of but a few but as the author always emphasizes there is no single one law and also you would tend to be better in certain laws and need support in others.

TEAMWORK.

- The Law of Significance

One is too small a Number to achieve greatness.

- The Law of the big picture

The goal is more important than the role.

Example of this was the way certain projects were approached. It was a case of finding the best Engineering solution that would satisfy Production and other requirements before approaching it from a commercial point of view. If done right you will already have the best price on the table.

- The Law of the Niche

Each player has a place where they add the most value.

- The Law of the Scoreboard

The team can make adjustments when they know where they stand.

This is an attempt to make a case with the study of how recognition of Leadership principles with the learning of additional new skills-KAMS- made a significant impact on the success of this project.

This is true today more than ever with the speed at which things are changing. You do not have to believe in these laws just as the law of gravity can be ignored by you but step out the window on the first floor and you find that the law exist.

I will close by giving credit to Dr John C Maxwell who unknown to him has been my own personal mentor for a walk of some 8 years .