Team-Based Leadership Development
-- Why together is better...

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Educating executives, managers, supervisors and other leaders remains a major concern for companies eager to keep their organizations afloat or even thriving in a challenging economic environment. Frankly, the limiting factor for most organizations continues to be leadership.

Leadership development is not a new concept. It continues, however, to be practiced in ways that – at best – do little to develop successful leaders and – at worst – damage functional relationships by allowing learning to exist in silos and independent “vacuums.”

The problem is not content. Adequate topical content is a dime-a-dozen, and represents time-tested applications and concepts that have not changed much in a couple of millennia. Any of a number of firms create and publish reasonably valid content.

The principal challenge around effective development is relevancy. The content mentioned above is generic, and must be made relevant for a specific functional or hierarchical group, within a specific organization. Then, when properly facilitated, we can at least hope to successfully develop a group of leaders.

The biggest issue, though, in effectively developing a group, team, gaggle, or flock of leaders is making sure they all learn the same things, the same way, and in the same context. Further, they should be able to test relevant applications and concepts together, for best learning and application.

Enter Team-Based Leadership Development.
Now, I’m not speaking of team-building, per se; nor am I talking about campfires, challenge/ropes courses, falling-backward trust exercises, or other hardly-effective methods of development.

I’m simply talking about developing a team or group of leaders at the same time, together. In my consulting firm, we see more and more firms wanting content specific for their groups; you just can’t get there when sending people out to some public session or seminar trying to be all things to all people.

You need your leaders developed together, learning applications and concepts relevant to your organization. By using Team-Based Leadership Development, all leaders of a particular level or function learn these things at the same time, in the same room, using each other as learning tools.

The advantages of this approach should be fairly obvious, and include demonstrated successes in:

1. **Improving communication flow** within the team and out to the organization. This can occur naturally, and in a less stressful, facilitated environment. Conversations like this...

   a) ...benefit the organization, by providing calm discussions among leaders of similar hierarchical or functional levels, about just about anything important occurring in the organization today, and

   b) ...benefit the specific leaders involved, as they not only are discussing new learnings and applications, but they now have the opportunity to discuss things not normally discussed.

For example, without a safer venue, how many mid or senior-level managers would ask a peer “Hey, John, what’s the best way for me to resolve a conflict in my department?” Or “Say, Susan, I’m having some issues in driving empowerment to my hourly employees – any suggestions?”

I’m guessing those conversations/questions, in the midst of our brutally hectic workdays, would be damned rare.

2. **Fostering mutual accountability** for behaviors and results. One of the biggest advantages in having all these leaders in one location discussing the same things is that accountabilities can become institutionalized. It’s one thing to make a casual mention in the hallway; another thing altogether to commit to a group today, then speak with them a month or so later about your progress.
Also, this close-in work environment creates team ground rules that foster cohesion; if we agree in a group that behind-the-back caucusing is not something we’ll do, then having those back-stabbing conversations later just doesn’t feel right. Further, open communications in a facilitated classroom inevitably translate to more open conversations in the workplace.

3. **Faster assimilation**, shared accountabilities, and increased understanding. This is the financial “why?” answered. Homogeneous participants learn faster, and the learning is more relevant. Therefore, an organization’s return on those development dollars is quicker, and the skills more appropriate for the organization’s needs.

Understanding is accelerated; participants can discuss/explain with each other on various points and concepts, making sure that the meaning is the same for all, and that more realize how they can actually be used for leadership success.

Participants in Team-Based Leadership Development are able to identify their primary strengths quicker, and better understand how building on those contributes to higher levels of personal satisfaction and team success.

In short, all win. And the organization is better for it.