Leading Effective Interdisciplinary Teams

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Why talk about teams and leading effective interdisciplinary teams in health care organizations? Historically in health care, physicians and particularly anesthesiologists working in operating rooms have worked somewhat in isolation and independently from the organizations they are working in. Anesthesiology residency classically trained anesthesiologists to give superb preoperative and intraoperative care to their patients with little or no structured education in the workings of the rest of the health care organization and business management, and no training in leading teams to solve problems. Times have changed to the extent that anesthesiologists are now often looked to in complex health care organizations to become leaders of change in and outside the operating room. Being perioperative specialists, anesthesiologists must step up and help lead teams within their organizations in all phases of perioperative care, perioperative management, quality and safety management, pain management, critical care management and so on. Being a primarily hospital-based specialty, anesthesiologists are in a unique position to understand organizational behavior and insert themselves into many aspects of the health care operation. This chapter will focus on several goals and objectives as it relates to leading effective interdisciplinary teams. We will:

- Define an interdisciplinary team.
- Describe different leadership styles.
- Discuss the concept of shared governance.
- Describe characteristics of an effective team.
- Describe how to pick the right team members.
- Describe the stages of group development.
- Describe dysfunctional dynamics on a team.

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- Describe meeting preparation and conduct.
- Describe how to measure the success of a team.

■ What is an Interdisciplinary Team and Why is it Important to Work in Interdisciplinary Teams?

The word interdisciplinary is defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary as "involving two or more academic, scientific, or artistic disciplines." In our case, this would imply that there are 2 or more health care or departmental disciplines teaming up to work on a project or issue together. In most instances, the word interdisciplinary can be used interchangeably with the word multidisciplinary when talking about team dynamics. The value of different disciplines working together on a team is that health care is very complex and over the last few decades organizations have realized that matrix structures, cross-functional teams, and interdisciplinary teams are needed to deal with the many issues facing an organization. The rapid change and adaptation required to ensure organizational success and survival have led organizations to move away from a traditional hierarchical structure to one that is more dynamic, team-oriented, and interdisciplinary in nature.[1] In addition, the problems that organizations face today are generally too complex for 1 individual or a team from 1 discipline to solve.[2] Most health care organizations have taken a page from the business community and the teachings in business schools that tend to believe that the product of many individuals on a team is far superior to that of 1 individual. In addition, when a product comes from an interdisciplinary team, there is a built-in buy-in and investment by those involved team members that will ultimately drive the success of the team as the product is rolled out in the organization.

■ Leadership Styles

There is a quote from a famous writer and business consultant, Peter Drucker, that states, "Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things." Sometimes the words manager and leader are used synonymously, but they are not interchangeable terms. The manager on a team can also be the leader but the manager sets the tone and keeps everyone on course, whereas the leader sets the vision and overall strategy.

When you talk about leadership, there are many books analyzing this subject and many opinions on categories or types of leaders. It is important to understand that any leader will probably have a style they tend to identify with and use most of the time, but most leaders will vary their leadership style depending on the situation that is confronting

them at the moment, shifting in and out of multiple styles to get their job done.

Coleman[3] did a 3-year study of over 3000 mid-level managers, analyzing their leadership behaviors, and published the results of this study in the article "Leadership That Gets Results" in the *Harvard Business Review*, March to April 2000. Coleman described 6 leadership styles in this article:

(1) Pace-setting leader: this type of leader expects and models excellence and self-direction and works best when the team is already somewhat motivated and skilled. This team and this leader have probably worked together before or have some history and they know what to expect of one another, and therefore little upfront work is needed to get started on a project or issue. The leader in this case needs quick results, but this style can overwhelm the team members and squelch innovation if they are not careful because of the pressure to perform in a rapid cycle situation. Coleman sums up this style in the phrase "Do as I do, now."

(2) Authoritative leader: this type of leader will mobilize the team to a common vision and focuses on the end goals, leaving the means to that end up to each individual on the team. This leadership style can sometimes be viewed in a very negative way. Some team members may feel a lack of guidance that can be disconcerting and unsettling. This style will work best when the team needs a new vision because circumstances have changed, or when explicit guidance is not required. Authoritative leaders have an entrepreneurial spirit and enthusiasm for the vision and mission at hand. Coleman sums up this style in the phrase "Come with me."

(3) Affiliative leader: this type of leader will work to create emotional bonds that bring a feeling of belonging to the organization. This style works best when the team is stressed or recovering from trauma or disappointment and there is a need to recover and rebuild trust. This style relies on the leader to be nurturing and aware that the members need praise. As stated, it is a style that is used in a special circumstance such as during a recovery and if used routinely or exclusively can foster mediocrity and lack of focus. Coleman sums up this style in the phrase "People come first."

(4) Coaching leader: as with sports this style of leadership develops the members of a team for the future. The leader looks to help the team members develop their own personal strengths that make them more successful overall. Team members must be coachable though and this style will not work if the team members are defiant and are unwilling to change or learn. Coleman sums up this style in the phrase "Try this."

(5) Coercive leader: this type of leader demands that there be immediate compliance and is most effective when there is a crisis

and the leader must take action and have others follow without question. This can be used when there is a problem team member who must be controlled because there is some destructive behavior or action. This style should be avoided unless all else has failed because it can alienate people and stifle flexibility and inventiveness. Coleman sums up this style in the phrase "Do what I tell you."

(6) Democratic leader: this type of leader builds consensus through group participation and is most effective when the leader needs the team to buy into an idea or have ownership of a decision, plan, or goal. This style would not be a good choice in a crisis or emergency or when team members are not informed enough to offer sufficient guidance to the leader or the team. Coleman sums up this style in the phrase "What do you think?"

As stated earlier, most leaders will tend to identify with 1 or 2 leadership styles and be comfortable with them, but also understand that as the situation dictates most of these styles will be used from time to time.

■ What is Shared Governance in an Organization or on a Team?

Shared governance is a management/leadership style or organizational model that decentralizes control and allows for many to be involved in decision making instead of a few or just 1. In this model, leadership is there to advise, consult, coach, mentor, and allocate resources, and may or may not have veto power. This style of management and leadership mandates collaboration among the teams working in the organization and provides a high degree of autonomy. With this autonomy though comes decentralized responsibility and accountability. This concept goes hand and hand with the realization that the product of the many is better than the product of the few. This concept in an organization tends to provide transparency and knowledge sharing by many instead of just leadership and gets more involved and invested. Leaders that utilize shared governance in their organizations will often have more motivated employees and staff because they are more invested.

■ Characteristics of an Effective Team

The following are 8 characteristics of an effective team as described by Larson and LaFasto[4] in their book titled "*Teamwork: What Must Go Right/What Can Go Wrong*." They undertook a 3-year study of teams and

team dynamics and described these 8 characteristics needed for an effective team:

(1) The team must have a clear goal: when setting out to establish a goal or goals for the team, avoid having your goal be fuzzy or ambiguous. The goal should be clear and well defined with a clear and specific objective or endpoint so that everyone understands the objective. Having a fuzzy goal will cause confusion and conflict within a team, along with causing scope creep. The team will go off on a tangent and waste time solving other problems instead of the one at hand. Discovering other issues is not uncommon or a bad thing, but if the goal of the team is clear these other issues can be tabled or placed in a parking lot and dealt with separately or as part of another project.

(2) The team must have a results-driven structure: if there was a clear goal established, the expectation of the group now would be that they should operate in a manner that produces the results. As the group works toward the goal, usually issues and obstacles related to the goal will be identified. It is up to the leadership to remove any barriers for the team to accomplish their goals.

(3) The team must have competent team members: this is an extremely important characteristic and should not be underestimated if a team is to be successful in accomplishing its goal. This comes down to individual knowledge, group knowledge, and team selection as it relates to the task at hand. The leader must understand the goal clearly and select team members who have the knowledge to contribute to solving the problem. Many times leaders fail because they do not have the right people working on their project or have forgotten to include a key player. Once meetings begin, it may become clear that someone was left off the original invitation who has some important contribution to make. In this case the leader might add a team member to fill this void. Another important thing to remember when forming a team is to look at all levels within your organization. Often it is not a manager who has the most to contribute but the front-line workers who will have the best insight and offer the best solutions to a problem. It is also these individuals who will help to map the process or problem most efficiently so that the team will understand the issues and be able to move to the correct result or conclusion.

(4) The team must have a unified commitment: a unified commitment should be expected with the formation of a clear goal. This does not mean that there will not be tension and conflict as the team works through the problem. Tension and conflict on a team are actually good things that should not be discouraged because it will create important dialog and spark innovation within a team. It is when conflict becomes counter-productive that the leader must step in and redirect the conversation in a more productive direction. Look out

for individual efforts that appear self-motivated or self-serving and confront these quickly so that the team can move into solving the problem as a shared vision.

(5) The team must have a collaborative climate: this is extremely important for a team. All members should feel that they are in a safe, open, and honest environment, where there is mutual respect for everyone's opinion and input. It is not a bad idea to state this at the beginning of the first few meetings so that it is clear that all should be confident in speaking up and contributing without fear. It is also extremely important for the leader to model this behavior during meetings and take issue with any situation where a team member's opinion is not heard and respected. Seeing this unfold will bring amazing results because, as stated earlier, many times it is the front-line worker who has the best solution but is often reluctant to speak up and offer an opinion. Having an open, safe, and respectful environment on a team will allow for this open dialog and get the best result.

(6) The team must have high standards that are understood by all: team members should have a clear understanding of what is expected of them individually as well as expectations for the entire team. Team members should uphold those standards and hold their fellow members accountable as well. If there is no trust within the team, it is not a safe environment to express thoughts, and the interactions in the team will become superficial and shallow and will undermine the workings of the team and the product.

(7) The team must receive external support and encouragement: leaders of the team and leaders of an organization should not be afraid to offer praise and encouragement to a team for work well done. This will foster a feeling of mutual respect and make the team work harder for the organization.

(8) The team must have principled leadership: a principled leader will be a respected and trusted leader. It is very important for the team to trust the leader's judgment and abilities to captain the project they are working on. If this is the case and the team feels supported, the members will work hard for the team and the leader. If the members of the team feel that the leader is putting himself or herself above the team and using the team for his or her personal recognition, the trust will deteriorate and the team will likely fall apart.

▪ Choosing the Right Team Members

Several things must be considered in the selection of people when putting together a team for a project:

Scope of the project: what is the purpose of the project, the timeline required to complete the project, and the expertise needed to complete the project? This must be defined and clear before moving into the selection of the team members.

Tasks that need to be accomplished: what skill mix is necessary for the project? It is not uncommon to forget a discipline when first setting up to start a project. When identified, an appropriate member should be added to the team or invited for the period of need.

Data and information that needs to be obtained and interpreted: what is the goal of the project? Answering this question will help you understand what information will be needed and what expertise is needed so that the right individuals can be invited onto the team.

Personality mix: this comes with some experience within an organization and leaders often draw from past experience on teams to help them with this aspect. In creating a team, it is important for the personalities on the team to enhance each other and not clash too much. Although it is good to have healthy and constructive conflict to get the best product, some personalities may not get along and this will undermine the overall happiness on the team. Some team members may not show up to a meeting if they fear conflict and the overall result will suffer as a consequence.

Reliability: this is very important to the concept of commitment on a team. If a member is not committed it will become obvious and the member may need to be replaced if he or she proves to be unreliable. In the first meetings, it is important to ask the team the best times to meet so that reliability is improved.

∎ Stages of Group Development

Tuckman[5] is an often quoted educational phycologist who described 4 stages of group development in 1965 in an article in the *Psychological Bulletin* entitled "Developmental Sequence in Small Groups." Later he and Jensen[6] refined it and added a fifth stage in 1977. Tuckman examined the behavior of small groups in a variety of settings and recognized that there were distinct phases that these groups or teams went through before they achieved maximum effectiveness.

Stage 1–Forming: this is the initial phase of a team and is the honeymoon phase where the members are driven by the desire to be accepted by the other members of the team and there is avoidance of controversy and conflict. Most serious issues and feelings are avoided and the team members focus on being busy with the routines of starting the project at hand, such as establishing schedules and meeting times, scoping the project, establishing a charter, information gathering, and other mundane tasks. But do not be fooled; the members of the team

are sizing each other up and gathering information during this phase. It is a very comfortable phase but the avoidance of conflict means that not much is actually getting done.

Stage 2–Storming: this is the stage where conflict among the members begins. Members of a newly formed team can only hold their tongue and remain nice to each other for so long before important issues that spark controversy and polarizing opinions are discussed. This is not a bad thing because the groups' thought processes come out and can be discussed openly. Also, members of the group start establishing a sort of pecking order and it will become obvious who the leaders in the group are. Many people thrive in this environment but others will want to revert to the comfort and security of stage 1 if they are conflict averse. This is the phase that will give the basis for much of the out-of-the-box thinking that is often needed on any project.

Stage 3–Norming: as stage 2 ends, the rules of engagement are established in the group, and the scope of the project, tasks involved, and individual responsibilities are now clear and agreed upon. Everyone now knows the personalities of the others and starts appreciating each other's contributions to the goal. They start really listening to each other, trusting each other, valuing each other's opinions and strengths, supporting each other, and getting the sense of being on a cohesive and effective team.

Stage 4–Performing: at this point everyone knows each other well enough to be able to work together in a trusting relationship. Group productivity is high and there is almost an unspoken seamless performance of tasks at hand. Everyone is aware of each other's strengths and weaknesses and knowledge of who should do what at this point. The high level of comfort means that all the energy of the team members can be directed to the tasks at hand. Not all teams or groups get to this level.

Stage 5–Adjourning: this is the stage of completion of the task and disengagement of the team. Members of the team can now celebrate the success but it may also be bittersweet and a time of mourning for some due to a sense of loss felt by group members.

■ Dysfunctional Teams and Dysfunctional Dynamics on a Team

In his book "*Overcoming the Five Dysfunctions of a Team*," Lencioni[7] describes the 5 dysfunctions on a team and gives good advice on how to overcome these dysfunctions. A team that is functioning at a high level will be able to overcome these as they work together and it is up to leadership on any team to understand these dysfunctions, recognize

when any one of them is occurring, and step in to get past them in a constructive manner.

Dysfunction #1–absence of trust: the members of a team must feel that they can trust one another. This trust is on all levels. They should be able to trust each other in both a fundamental way and on an emotional level as well. Over time they should feel comfortable with each other and expose their vulnerabilities. Over this time they will know each other's weaknesses, strengths, fears, and behaviors well enough to know how to utilize this to the team's advantage. If this trust exists in a team, it will lead to complete openness without filters and ideas will flow. If this trust cannot be established it will stifle the openness and the team will become dysfunctional and nonproductive.

Dysfunction #2–fear of conflict: as discussed earlier, conflict should not be feared but it should be embraced and recognized as a way to generate ideas that normally would not come forth. Conflict should not be encouraged routinely, but engaging in passionate dialogue around the issues and decisions is very important for the success of the outcome. A functional team should not be afraid of engaging in healthy conflict in the quest for answers and solutions. It is out of this conflict that the best product will emerge in the end. Dysfunctional teams will be more conflict averse and will not trust each other in situations when conflict arises. It is up to the leaders on any team to understand this, mediate this conflict, and help the team move forward in a productive manner.

Dysfunction #3–lack of commitment: commitment of the team to a project or task is extremely important. Usually in the beginning of team formation and contact, everyone is fresh and enthusiastic and there is sort of a honeymoon period. This can wane if some of the other dysfunctions creep into the group's interactions. There may be some points of conflict and some of the members may not trust the relationship yet; therefore, they may not contribute or voice an opinion. It is up to the leader to recognize whether any lack of commitment due to group dysfunction is taking place so that they can remedy this and reemphasize the safe environment where all opinions are welcomed and encouraged. It is also the duty of the leader to control any conflict that seems to be out of control and inappropriate both in the meeting environment and outside the meeting environment. The leader must remain very open to members contacting them and discussing any concerns so that the commitment can be maintained.

Dysfunction #4–avoidance of accountability: all team members must be accountable in the end for the team's product or output. It cannot be just the leader of the team who is accountable, although it is important for the team leader to guide the team toward this accountability and make sure they understand that this is everyone's responsibility. In the end, it will be the team's success or failure and it will be the team that will reap the rewards and celebration.

Dysfunction #5–inattention to results: as you may guess those teams that develop trust in one another and their leader, engage in healthy and productive conflict during the process, commit to their decisions as a team, and hold each other accountable for their actions and the final product will in the end have the best results. It is the collective actions of the team that will get them to the goal if they trust the process as it unfolds. If the team does not develop trust, shies away from conflict, never commits, and does not hold each other accountable, it will become extremely dysfunctional and produce a result that is not ideal and will probably not be a result that they can be proud to be a part of.

■ Getting Started and Meeting Conduct

At the formation of a team it is important to establish a team charter. The charter will help to keep the team focused on the task at hand and not stray too much. It is important to establish this charter in the first several meetings. It seems like a simple task but can sometimes be quite challenging to create. Elements of a charter might be as follows:

- Team name or project name: giving the team and the project a name will provide an identity and a sense of belonging and purpose that cannot be underestimated.
- Team leaders or champions: the leaders or champions of the team are the ones who establish the strategic vision, guide the team through the process, remove barriers to accomplishing the goals, and provide the necessary resources to be successful.
- Team members: simply list the names, department, and contact information.
- Expected output: this is the expected deliverable at the end.
- Metrics for the project.
- Expected meeting requirements and commitment.
- Timeline.

Every meeting should have an agenda on what the team should be accomplishing during the meeting. The agenda will keep the team focused on the tasks at hand so that the meeting can be productive. This is not to say that things will not come up during a meeting that are not a part of the agenda. If they do, the leader and team members should decide whether these should be discussed during the meeting or tabled and maybe put in a parking lot for a subsequent meeting.

There are many formats for meeting agendas but a common structure for an agenda may look like this:

- Call to order by the chair of the committee.
- Review of the minutes to the last meeting.
- Old business to be discussed.
- New business to be discussed.

- Open forum section.
- Time of the next meeting.
- Recap of assignments and items for the next meeting.
- Adjourn.

All meetings need minutes to help the team keep focused. Minute taking can be rotated among the team members. If there is an administrative person who can come to the meeting, this would be the best option for consistency and the team members will not be distracted by taking minutes and can contribute during the meeting.

It is wise to distribute the meeting minutes from the previous meeting and the agenda for the current meeting to all members several days before the meeting for review before coming to the meeting. These can be e-mailed to the members or attached to the invite for the next meeting.

■ The First Meeting

Start the meeting with a brief discussion as to why everyone has been invited and the task at hand. This can be somewhat brief because the members of the team should be the ones involved with establishing their purpose in the charter that will be developed in subsequent meetings. After this introduction, everyone should introduce themselves and say what department they are from. This will give the members some clues as to the depth and breadth of what they are about to embark on.

The leaders should make some things very clear at this first meeting. The leader should:

- Let everyone on the team know that they are in a safe environment and no idea is a bad idea. This will begin establishing member trust and trust in the leader.
- Encourage ideas and expression from all members. Often the best idea comes from someone you would least expect.
- Establish regular meeting times by asking the members what days and times are good for them to meet. Let them all also know that if they cannot attend, communicate to the leader any assignment they are responsible for and/or send a representative in their place.
- Define the scope of the project and give some idea as to the desired timeline to completion. Every project or task is different. Some may take only a couple of weeks to months, whereas some may take an extended period of time if extremely complex.
- Begin the charter or at the very least let them know what the project will entail. Give them information or examples of a charter so they can start thinking about this for the next meeting.

- As stated earlier, minutes of the team meetings are important and this is the time to let everyone know who will be doing the minutes.
- Recap what is needed before the next meeting and decide on the time of the next meeting. Let everyone know that the minutes from the last meeting will be sent to them along with the agenda, with an expectation that these will be reviewed before the meeting so that the meeting time can be used productively.

Meetings can be very interesting at times, and fascinating subjects and topics can come up, but it is very important for the leader to keep the team on track and prevent "scope creep." These are the tangents that teams sometimes go on but they need to realize that they are not there to solve all the problems in the organization. If there are important ideas brought forth, the leader can take these to the right place in the organization for discussion and resolution.

■ Measuring Success of Your Team

The measurement of the team's success will come from the output or product produced by the team as well as how successfully over time this output or product stands up, is used, is followed, and produces the results desired by the organization. During the project it is very important to establish metrics that can be tracked and trended over time. These metrics will give some important information on the success of the project. The metrics may show that there are areas that can be improved upon so that changes in the output or process can be made.

At the end of any project it is important to decide whether the team will continue to exist to monitor the results or whether this will be passed on to another entity. In addition, in any project it is important to celebrate at the end. This is many times forgotten and the power of celebration and recognition by the leader and the organization of a job well done cannot be overemphasized.

■ Conclusions

Well there you have it in a nutshell. Sometimes this process is very easy and sometimes it is fraught with a great deal of turmoil but the concept of the interdisciplinary team approach to solving problems is here to stay and really does work if the right individuals are put to the challenge. It is important for leaders in any organization to remember that it is the people within the organization that are their most valuable resource. It is these people that will come forward in interdisciplinary teams to come up with amazing ideas to solve the problems of the organization.

The author declares that he has nothing to disclose.

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