

Week 7 Case Study: The Army Crew Team

Blaine Reichart

University of Saint Mary

Introduction

Colonel Stas Preczewski faced a serious situation as the coach of the Army Crew team for the United States Military Academy at West Point. It was the end of the season and the Junior Varsity team was frequently beating the Varsity team during practices and in some races. Coach P. had selected the Varsity members based on the top eight in speed, strength and coordination whereas the Junior Varsity team was comprised of the bottom eight rowers of the entire team. After many attempts to understand and resolve this situation, Coach P. was left frustrated. It was one week before the National championship race and Coach P. deliberated over several options. He could promote the entire JV team to the Varsity boat for the race, switch individual boat members between the two boats, or he could somehow intervene in an attempt to improve the Varsity boat's performance. Is it possible, in such a short timeframe given, before the National championship race to assess, identify, and correct the problems that are inhibiting the Varsity team from their full potential?

Problem Identification

Three problems identified in this situation include lack of leadership, lack of trust, and lack of positive communication between members of the Varsity team. These ineffective traits could be recognized during the meeting after their final loss to the Junior Varsity team. No team leader has emerged due the fact that trust between members is limited. In addition, it was well verbalized by team members during the meeting that several members of the team are focused on their individual performance instead of the team's performance. These problems must be addressed quickly by Coach P. if the Varsity team has any chance of finishing well in the National championship races.

Analysis

Although the Varsity row team was created by members who finished top in strength, speed, and coordination, they were obviously not given the correct tool to succeed as a team. As a result, conflict and decreased performance has occurred. Patricia M. Buhler (2014) states that “Members must be trained to understand the key elements of what it means to be a team and must be provided some guidance and tools in team dynamics. Only when armed with the appropriate tools and resources can team members and their teams be successful” (p 17). Occasionally a group with similar goals will come together and strive effectively as a team without formal instruction given, but in this case the Varsity team needs the tools laid out clearly in order to be a successful team. Lack of teamwork from the Varsity team can be seen through the fact that they had several team disrupters and members talked about performance on an individual level instead of as a team. In order for members to successfully function as a team they must build trust, establish a team charter, communicate effectively, understand the value to conflict, clarify individual roles, step out of the comfort zone, and actively participate (Buhler, 2014). While the Varsity team has already met some of these necessary steps, they are also lacking in many. The Varsity team has established a team charter and as a result, team members are all aware of their main objective: win races. Although the main objective is well known, small obtainable goals will allow members to foster trust and communication in each other (Buhler, 2014). In addition, individual roles are clarified and understood based on the seat that each rower sits. What is lacking in role clarification is the lack of leadership and a single leader of the team.

As mentioned above, the Varsity team needs a trustworthy leader to guide the team to success. Revathi Turaga (2013) states that “every leader needs to choose to consciously work on

techniques and actions to leverage the team and help build, sustain, maintain, and spread the sense of trust, bonding and synergy in the team” (p 31). Commonly, a team leader will emerge easily yet other times a leader needs to be assigned. The team leader is generally respected by team members, represents the values of the team, aids the team in accomplishing goals, and supports members in accomplishing goals (Ivancevich, Konopaske & Matteson, 2013). The leader also represents the team outside of the group, assists in building trust among members, and keeps the team running as a functional unit (Ivancevich, Konopaske & Matteson, 2013). Building, maintaining, and sustaining bonds of trust within a team is critical for performance (Turaga, 2013).

In addition to trust, effective communication within a team is crucial. In order for teams to achieve their goals successfully, effective communication must take place between members (Chong, Eerde, Rutte, & Chai, 2012). Coach P. encouraged team members to email each other with the goal of supporting one another’s efforts towards a winning mentality. Unfortunately the members of the Varsity team used the emails to point out individual flaws and complain about other members to Coach P. Ineffective communication took place between the Varsity team during the final meeting. The discussion on performance and team work escalated quickly to a discussion filled with finger pointing and blaming members for the team’s poor performance.

Solution Statement

With the National championship race quickly approaching, Coach P should attempt to intervene to improve the Varsity boat’s performance instead of switching the team boats or switching individual members. Coach P. first needs to assign a team leader or simply take charge and take action if any team disrupters arise and affects the team’s positive norm. Small goals

should be set for the team and as they obtain those goals, trust and commitment between members will hopefully be obtained. Open discussion of team member's thoughts and feelings should be encouraged and it should be known by every member that all opinions should be respected. By allowing open dialect, individual frustrations towards members and the team can be avoided. In addition, group activities should be organized in order to encourage bonding and trust. All members need to trust their teammates in order to increase their rowing performance. It is unknown if Coach P. will have enough time to successfully implement these recommendations in order to succeed at the National championship level.

References

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