

# TEAM MANAGEMENT IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: A HUMAN RELATIONS THEORY ANGLE

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## **Abstract**

*Team management is a system of managing performance through the total involvement of every employee working toward aligned, measurable and performance goals. It involves working together with a group of people to attain a certain goal. Team management like every other sphere of life or organization has been affected by the 21<sup>st</sup> century dispensation. Its impact on teamwork and team management is positive and also negative just like its impact on the organization or society at large. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterized by the advent of technology. Today teamwork and even its management has gone virtual because of the advent of technology. Virtual team management is the ability to organise, and coordinate with effectiveness a group whose members are not in the same location or time zone, and may not even work for the same organization. An important aspect of successfully managing a team is about understanding human relation, that is, the manager understanding the team members on an individual basis and also the team members understanding each other. Also the paper reveals that virtual team management has helped increase the number of experts in team membership and it has also helped disprove the statement that teamwork is localised. Although, it is inevitable that the virtual teamwork will not bring its challenges, but the researcher also gave recommendations that can help team managers. The problem ranges from membership isolation to lack of communication and poor network, among others.*

**Keywords:** *Teamwork, Team Management, Virtual Team Management, Human Relation theory*

## **Introduction**

Successful organisations are attributed to the leaders of the organizations, but today that statement can be seen as a fallacy. Because a successful organisation is one with a group of genius that collaborates or work has a team. This notion has helped correct the saying that significant milestones of an organisation are solely the duty of the leaders. In the view of Molinsky, Devenport, Lyer and Davidson (2012) the emerging changes affecting organisations are almost incomprehensible. This change does not just affect the organisation, but it also affects the employees. Their argument is that organizations are fast changing from hierarchical and centralised decision making process and particularly an authoritative management style to one that is team based. It cannot be out rightly stated that teamwork is a new concept and that its existence is also a result of the emerging changes that organisations are experiencing, but the truth is that compare to the late 90's organisations are embracing teamwork better. Teamwork as becomes indispensable in almost every company and organisations. In fact Collins (2001)

stated that leaders are now interested in people or talent that can bring the management dream to reality, a group of people that are willing to share the problems and success of the organisation.

Organisations are now interested in teamwork as a result of globalization, information and communication technology and information overload and access among others. All this has geared organisations toward the hunt for talents, and leaders that are willing to work alongside their followers and followers or co-leaders that are supportive. Mathan (2012) asserted that the 21<sup>st</sup> century organisation is one that is highly competitive. He further stated that “a new kind of competitive work environment, is emerging where, cutting edge knowledge, ingenuity and new ideas make a big difference in advancement and hence there remains a constant hunt for talent and hiring people having agility, the requisite skills and competencies, inclination for updating, penchant for learning and doing work in a better way through the constant innovative approach.

Teamwork is perhaps one of the most innovative approaches that the 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought to organisations. Team work majorly entails a group of people with different skills and different task, who work together on a company project, service, or goal with a meshing of functions and mutual support. Teamwork is also a function of team building. Every organisation willing to achieve or attain a certain height must get involved in team building. Edmondson (2012) team building is a dynamic task, it involves a simultaneous relationship between learning and execution and that teamwork is the engine of organisational learning”. Team FME (2013) noted that team building is one that revolves around the manager and especially the relationship that exists between the managers and the team member.

Miller (2011) describes team management as the relationship that exists between employees, their manager and their organisation. Wikipedia describes team management as the ability of an individual or an organisation to administer and coordinate a group of individuals to perform a task. It also involves teamwork, communication, objective setting and performance appraisals. Based on this definition, it can be deduced that team management is about managing the human relationship. To manage any team, understanding the relationship that exists among members seems to be the key success. Human relation theory is one that seeks to establish a link between the relationship that exists between members and their ability to accomplish a given task. In the work of Ratha, (n.d) citing Mayo, (1880-1949) noted that understanding and maintaining a good relations between members of a work task is the key to achieving organisational success.

This paper seeks to ascertain the impact of the 21<sup>st</sup> century on team work and especially its management, what is the role of human relations theory in team management, what are the problems militating against team management in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and what solutions can be proffered to such problems? The questions will be dealt will under the following sub-headings: 21<sup>st</sup> century, team management in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the human relation theory, the relationship between team management and human relation theory, problems or challenges, conclusion and recommendation.

## **Organisational Structure in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

The obvious truth is that many businesses today, even in Nigeria and around the world are “old and in the way”. According to the Leading Edge Forum (2016), “we have sleepwalked into the 21st century with 20th century business models, organisation structures, talent, strategies, leadership styles and infrastructures. Whilst plenty of ideas abound, our current business models, assumptions and working patterns are old and in the way”. The group further stated that the evolution of technology or digital device has compelled most organisations to change, but it is still not enough because it has affected an aspect of the organisation and not the totality. The 21<sup>st</sup> century structure is one that calls for an aggressive approach towards shielding slow and inflexible development process, work place that suppress opinion rather than unleash potentials and also works with outdated assumptions rather than global macroeconomic (an example is a library).

The 21<sup>st</sup> century structure according to the Leading Edge Forum (2016) is characterised by a proactive sensing organ: 21st century enterprises need to devote significantly more investment to sensing, and to make sure that the investment spreads throughout the enterprise (rather than being seen as a separate function), more proactive and haptic (experimenting and making rather than just reading and thinking), and its coverage is broader than just technology or just your industry, team structure with an identity and a strategy that makes sense in an increasingly digital world, and inspire customers, citizens, staff, partners and other stakeholders, organisation with an outside-in approach to assets and capabilities that recognises the importance of tapping in to the Matrix, prioritizes the ability to attract and unleash talent, and recognises information and customers as assets and sources of value and insight, not just workstations on the production line, a 360-degree digitally optimised portfolio of products and services, the ability to execute adaptively and value-centric leadership.

## **The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Organisation**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is one that is characterized by a change or transformation of an organization from one era to another or rather a drastic increase in the use of technology to create new ideas, market those ideas to consumers and communicate the message of a brand to those around the world. The increasing use of computerized resources has made the economy more global than ever before. It has made interaction with businesses and potential customers in far places easier. According to Kruschwitz and Roth (1999) Today's business environment is undergoing profound and far-reaching change. Globalization of industries, faster development times for new products and services, and advances in information and telecommunication technologies are altering the basis of competition among firms. Dike, Odiwe and Ehujor (2015) describes the 21st century or the new millennium as a period of transformation and change that has witnessed one of the most dramatic technological revolutions in human history after the industrial revolution. Martin (2006) has described the 21st century as an era that has changed everything we do: the way we communicate and the way we work. It is a period of

technological revolution that centres on the computers, information, and communication as well as multimedia technologies. Drucker (2001) sees the 21<sup>st</sup> century is a period of information challenges and increase in productivity of the knowledge worker.

### **Characteristics of 21<sup>st</sup> century Organisation**

The major characteristics of the 21<sup>st</sup> century organisation include, globalisation, information access, information overload and information access. The team has always been a part of work life or organisation. Leiwis (n.d) stated that although most people will enjoy and willingly join a team most times organisations are quick to attach individuals to one or will eventually compel individuals to a team so that organisational goals can be achieved. The team is usually made up of a group of people and according to Team FME (2013) what makes up a team aside from the number of members is the leader or the manager. Business dictionary describes team management as the administration of a group of people assembled to work on a particular project or to perform a particular function within an organisation. Managing a team is about setting team priorities, reviewing performance objectives, reviewing the performance and method employed to achieve the task and spearheading the team's decision making process. Miller (2011) opined that "team management is a system of managing performance through the total involvement of every employee working toward aligned, measurable and performance goals".

Management Study Guide (2017) asserted that team management is about using different activities to bring a group of people together with the aim of achieving organizational goals. It was emphasised that team management helps to extract the best from members; it also helps to mentor the members, foster willing participation among members during discussions, ensures effective communication, consistent, timely, and accurate information dissemination and also helps to curb idle gossips and dirty politics. A team leader also motivates his/her team members on a regular base to achieve organizational goals or group tasks.

Miller (2011) describes briefly what team management entails in the 90's. He stated that team leaders or managers were usually the day to day work supervisors and that the meeting was usually based on their weekly activities. It entails drawing of charts and a brief inscription showing the level of performance for the week, after which the supervisor will strategize on what activities, will be embarked on in the coming. Based on this description it can be deduced that team management then was a bit centralized and that it was even localized. The Team building Directory (2017) also concurred that teams established before now were localized and that team members were restricted in growth and development as a result organizations innovation level was low. But today team building and its management has gone virtual. It is important that to note that not all teams even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are virtual. According to Management Study Guide (2017), there are 8 types of teams and it includes: Permanent teams, Temporary teams, Task force, Committee, Organisation/Work force, Self-Managed teams, Cross functional teams and

Virtual teams but for the purpose of this paper we will focus on the Virtual teams.

According to Isotalo (2013) virtual teams are teams that interact or communicate via technologies. They are teams that are not restricted geographically or localized and are a team that gives room for individual growth and development.

**Virtual Teams**

Virtual is a 21<sup>st</sup> phenomenon; it is one that is not restricted to the physical space proximity and one that uses a 21<sup>st</sup> century tool as a means of communication (ICT) instead of the face-to-face interaction. In the work of Malhotra et al (2007) virtual teams are teams that its members are located in different part of the world, but they have the same goals or interest and are committed to enhancing organizational success. According to Kimball (1997) outlined below are some of the reasons for virtual teams

From	To
Fixed team member	Shifting team members
All team members drawn from within the organization	Team members can include people from outside the organization (clients, suppliers)
Team members are co-located organizationally and geographically	Team members are distributed organizationally and geographically
Teams have fixed starting and ending point	Teams form and reform continuously
Teams are managed by a single manager	Teams have multiple reporting relationships with different parts of the organization at different times

Serrat (2009) described the virtual team as a group of people that partake in a task interdependently with the aim of achieving a goal without considering the restriction that time, distance and the organization can pose. The peculiar thing about virtual team is the inability to have a face-to-face interaction and its reliance on technology.

**Qualities of virtual teams**

The qualities of virtual teams include, interdependent functions, shared purpose, joint responsibility for outcome, collective management of relationships across/ between organizational boundaries, geographical dispersion and technological-mediated communication rather than face-to-face communication

**Types of virtual teams**

According to Kimball (1997) virtual teams like any other teams are developed for a purpose and the following are examples of such teams

Executive teams: manager of an organization are by virtue of their position are a part of this team. The team is usually a semi-permanent team and it assigns responsibility for specific divisions or function of the organization

Project team: it usually involves the selection of experts around the project at hand and it elapses once the project is completed.

Community of practices team: it's a team of voluntary participants. This group is majorly created for learning purpose and it is not restricted to a particular project at hand. It also provides support to projects that revolves around its area of interest.

Virtual Team Management: Virtual team management is the "ability to organize and coordinate with effect a group whose members are not in the same location or time zone, and may not even work for the same organization" (Serrat, 2010: 55). Managing a virtual according to Serrat (2010) involves designing a clearly stated goal, ensuring full participation of all members, understanding the people, process, and technology and also recognizing the importance of trust which can be a limiting factor to the attainment of goals than the inability of members to meet face-to-face. Managing a virtual team from the opinion of Kimball (1997) is central on how to manage a team that its members are far apart from each other. It's all a thing of the mind, i.e. it entails the ability to change one's mind set on management issues. Her interest is managers of virtual teams are to take old management technique and transpose them into something acceptable in the new era.

Lewis (n.d) opined that a team management is the ability of the leader to have client focus and a sense of strategic clarity, i.e. knowing what the team's role is in line with the rest of the organization. There is a clear difference between managing a regular team and managing a virtual team, although they still share mutual concerns like creating openness, trust, involvement, and togetherness while avoiding confusion and frustration and meaningless rhetoric (Isotalo, 2013). Virtual team still exhibit their peculiarity in terms of flexibility, agility, cost-effectiveness than the regular team, although for managers or leader the role is more challenging in terms of process, and workflow, team spirit, cultural sensitivity and the use of technology. Fisher and Fisher (2010) stated that virtual team management includes

Managing tasks, Routines and Project Schedules: the most important focus area for a virtual team leader is processed fluency and overall team performance monitoring through mundane actions. The team manager should spend more time ensuring that all members share a basic understanding of what the organization is targeting to do especially in virtual set up. The team manager must provide the right quality of information rather than too much information or too little. He must also help the virtual team members communicate easily about the work in their real environment with good communication material.

Strategy work, Development tasks and Consulting: involving team members in strategic decisions and not overlooking the human element during interaction significantly enhances the effectiveness and experienced happiness of team members. These should be taken into discussion during a project. This is something that the manager/coordinator needs to bring up and urge the members to tell their

point of views. If there are any issues that need to be changed, it is up to the manager to execute changes.

Communication, Information flow, Building trust: empowering teams and distributing excessive trust among team member's results in efficiency and added satisfaction among team members. It is up to the manager to recognize different types of team members: members who are self-driven should be granted space and results expected on weekly or monthly meetings. Then members who need more guidance should be able to get support from the manager/project coordinator.

Distance management and technology: it is the responsibility of the team manager to choose the suitable media for different communication purpose. It is also the responsibility of the manager to ensure that all the equipment are in good shape

Change management and Stressful situation: for a team leader the key change is staying positive and projecting trust and hope toward the team, as the feelings can impact the surrounding team members and a positive approach might help reduce the stress of other team members. It is also key to stay positive because the leader has a strong influence on this; his/her attitude towards change and stress will surely impact the whole team. As a team it is important to put on the best act in the stressful situation, and then take the time to relax and recognize the efforts afterwards.

Conflicts, Chemistry Problems and Underperformance: This refers to sensitivity towards diversity and respect towards potential chemistry problems or conflict issues. A good leader can spot under performance before it occurs. Chemistry problems can be avoided by reacting in time, but sometimes it's hard because it's difficult to know everyone so well.

Team spirit, development and learning: it is important for managers to foster inclusiveness and involvement, selection of team members and assessment and development of team members. Team's success is important, but also individuals are celebrated. Mistakes, failures are great learning opportunities. Encourage team members to work together to learn from each other

Fischer and Fischer (2010) emphasised that because of the nature of the team it is important that the managers strive towards doing their best. The qualities and competencies of the team head (or the lack of them) becomes more transparent as a result of the tasking nature of virtual teaming. Hoefling (2003) also noted that virtual team management is successful only when they target the commitment of the various team members. A critical look at Kimball (1997) approach on team management stated the following

**Purpose:** the most crucial factor in virtual team management is the ability to recognize the purpose. Recognizing the purpose for which the team will help to maintain a certain degree of stability among team members

**Roles:** managers need to help virtual teams identify roles in the same way required of all teams. Also, additional roles must be added as regards the mode of communication among virtual team members. Because of the peculiar nature of virtual team every member must be carried along / all communication modules must be spelt out to avoid frustration.

**Weaving:** is a networking term that refers to the process of summarizing and synthesizing multiple responses in a virtual group. The weaving item or response tells people where they've been, where they are, and where they might want to go next. It also helps to identify issues people agreed upon or issues that still bring up many questions or requires more information

**Participation:** in a regular team it is easier to watch a participant reaction on issues in terms of body language, facial expression, etc. managers must acquire skills that helps them understands virtual team participant reaction to issues without considering the raw data at hand

Fischer and Fischer (2003) and Kimball (1997) highlighted some factors needed by leaders to attain a successful team management which include beliefs that teamwork is fundamentally social, it is important to create ways for team members to experience membership, engagement is inseparable from empowerment, failure to perform is often a result of exclusion from the process, leaders must live by example, they must be facilitators, and result catalyst

### **Virtual Teams Technologies**

1. Collaboration tools: helps team share information through a central hub, e.g. Slack, Sqwiggle, Grape e.t.c.
2. Project management tools: a tool that helps manage and plan projects, e.g. Microsoft project, Smartsheet, Workfront e.t.c.
3. Document storage/file sharing tools: tools to help store and share information securely among members e.g. Dropbox, Google drive, Sharepoint e.t.c.
4. Meeting tools: aids collaboration and conferencing through the use of WebEx, iMeet, Google Hangouts e.t.c
5. High-End video conferencing tools: having meetings through super high definition or real size video conferencing, e.g. Cisci Telepresence, Polycom Telepresence, Logitech lifesize e.t.c.
6. Conferencing tools: like Skye, Skype, Join me, Bluejeans e.t.c.
7. Instant messaging tools: Google Hangouts, Watsapp e.t.c.
8. Social network tools: Yammer, Chatter, Jive e.t.c
9. Scheduling tools: like Duddle, Timebridge, Scheduleonce e.t.c
10. Virtual team games: that helps build trust among members like Prelude and virtuwall e.t.c.



## **Human Relation theory**

Early management theories were built on the notion that if management could properly plan, organize and control jobs and organizations, productivity could increase. The early approaches emphasized technical aspects of the work, at the expense of the work's personal aspects. This aspect is clearly evident in the works of classical theorists such as Fredric W. Taylor, Frank and Lillian Gilbreth etc. Therefore, it is not surprising that theories were later developed that challenged some of the early fundamentals. Among the theories were the human relation theory and behavioral theory, although many researchers believe that these two theories share the same orientation, being that they both laid emphasizes on the individual rather than the job itself.

The human relation approach became very popular in the 1940's and early 1950's, it informed managers on the important roles individuals play in the success or failure of an organization (Plano et al 1978). It is a theory used to describe the ways in which managers interact with their subordinates. When management and employees stimulates more and better work conditions we have good human relations in the organization. When morale and efficiency deteriorate, human relations in the organization are bad. To create good human relations, managers must know why employees act as they do and what social and psychological factors motivate them (Stoner, 1978). The human relations theory is of the opinion that the relation between managers and subordinates are salient aspects of management.

One of the major contributors to the human relations approach was Elton Mayo (1880-1949). He together with his associates from Harvard University pioneered the use of scientific method in their studies of people in the work environment. His work was centred on the Hawthorne experiments. The experiment was carried out by dividing employees into two groups 'test group' that was subject to deliberate changes in lightening and a 'control group' who's lightening remained constant throughout the experiment. Mayo concluded that a complex emotional chain reaction had touched off the productivity increases. Because the test and control groups had been singled out for special attention, they developed a group pride that motivated them to improve their work performance. The sympathetic supervision they received had further reinforced their increased motivation. The result of this experiment gave Mayor his first important discovery, which means that when special attention is given to workers by management, productivity is likely to increase regardless of the actual changes in working conditions. This phenomenon became known as the Hawthorne effect.

Human relations scholars generally believe that if management showed more concern for their employees, their satisfaction should increase which would lead to an increase in productivity. They recommended the use of human relations techniques such as more effective supervision, employee counselling and giving workers more opportunities to communicate on the job.

## **Relationship between Human Relation Theory and Team Management**

The human relations theory of management was developed in the early 1920's during the industrial revolution. At that time, productivity was the focus of business. Mayo, E began his experiments (the Hawthorne Studies), to prove the importance of people for productivity not machines. The human relations management theory is of the belief that people desire to be part of a supportive team that facilitates development and growth. Therefore, if employees receive special attention and are encouraged to participate, they perceive their work has significance, and they are motivated to be more productive, resulting in high quality work.

The results of Mayo's Hawthorne studies proved that the factor most influencing productivity are relationships among team members and also between team members and their managers. The researchers realized productivity increased due to relationships and being part of a supportive group where each employee's work had a significant effect on the team output. It was also noticed that the increased attention the workers received leads to increased motivation and productivity, which is in line with Hawthorne Effect.

The Hawthorne theory was also linked to the motivational theories as revealed by Abraham Maslow and Douglas McGregor. Maslow theory comprises of five basic needs (physiological, safety, love, esteem and self-actualization) and he noted that as soon as team managers are able to identify individual needs and meet such needs, employees are motivated towards increasing productivity. McGregor in his opinion stated that the moment organization realize that employees contribute more to the organization when or if they feel responsible and valued, then productivity will increase.

The study of human relations in the workplace shows that people want to have a sense of belonging and significance while being treated with value and respect. Treat an employee with respect and value, and their individual productivity and quality increases support the organizational team.

## **Challenges of Virtual Team Management**

Kirkman et al (1995) suggested the following as pitfalls or challenges militating against virtual team management, starting with, team member isolation, feeling of loneliness or no reliance leads to quick detachment from common goals and centralized team efforts, decisions are harder to reach, partly due to trust building, synergy creation and communicational challenges that form the core issues of working in virtual teams.

For the leader there are extra challenges in store concerning evaluation, motivation and personal assessment of geographically separated team members. The ambiguous role of technology mediated communication and the use of different media poses new challenges for the virtual manager and time zone difference in timing due to the various locations

## Conclusion

Team management is about controlling and administering a group of people with common interest with the aim of achieving a goal or objective. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought about a lot of changes in the organization even in terms of managing a team. Globalization, information and communication technology, among others, have also affected team management. The truth is that teamwork has evolved from the regular face to face meeting and discussion it has gone virtual. Virtual teamwork involves communicating through technology device and even team management is done via technology. For any team to be effectively managed the manager must understand the human relations theory. This will enable the manager to understand better the team he is managing even from a distance. The 21<sup>st</sup> century has made team management more interesting and broad, it has also helped team member grow and develop in different sphere of life and particularly broaden the number of experts in the teamwork.

## Recommendations

The researcher recommends that

1. Manager must be able to involve all team members on the social platform used for discussion
2. Managers must understand the individual members and be able to bring out the best in each of his team members
3. Managers are expected to be firm and fast at decision making to avoid lapses
4. Managers must build a platform that permits trust and understanding
5. Communication is central to team management therefore the manager must be consistent, timely and accurate in information dissemination
6. Information must also be clearly stated so that every member understands the message it conveys
7. Motivating members of the team are also important, i.e. the manager must understand what motivate each of the team members
8. The manager must be a vast user of the technology and must be able to manipulate it properly
9. The timing of all discussion must be favorable to team members considering the time difference

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