

## Self-Managed teams

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### Self-Managed Teams

#### **What are Self-Managed teams?**

A Self-managed team, also known as a self-directed or self-regulated team, refers to a kind of team whereby unlike in the traditional models where there is a hierarchical model of administration, there is a perceived sense of freedom whereby members plan, determine and manage their day to day activities.

This leads to a system where there is a mutual responsibility among the members, as well as reduced or no responsibility at all. Self-Managed teams have proved to be an efficient way of human resource organisation since they not only enhance creativity and innovativeness, but they also lead to a situation where more is achieved while the operating costs are reduced (Glick 1998)

According to Gitman and McDaniel (2009), organizations work well when employees form functional teams. Human beings by nature need constant motivation and a reminder of the aim that should be achieved after a specified period.

The top management may not be able to maintain a constant presence within the firm that would help ensure that employees remain motivated. For this reason, it is important to ensure that another way of maintaining this motivation is found.

The best way of doing this is to ensure that employees are in a position to motivate themselves. This can only be possible if these employees are made to work as a team. Employees should be allowed to form small manageable teams focused on achieving specific objectives within the firm.

In 1990, Development Dimensions International, the Association for Quality and Participation, and Industry Week conducted a study on the current practice surrounding self-directed teams.

The study defined a self-directed team as a group of employees who have day-to-day responsibility for managing themselves and the work they do. Members of self-directed teams typically handle job assignments, plan and schedule work, make production-related decisions, and take action on problems. Members of self-directed teams work with a minimum of direct supervision. As such, the teams are not quality circles or cross-functional task groups.

Self Managed teams are characterized by:

- The face-to-face interaction in natural workgroups;
- Responsibility for producing a definable product;

- Responsibility for a set of interdependent tasks; and
- Control over managing and executing tasks.

This definition outlines the “end state” to which work groups evolve when they finally become self-managed teams. However, organizations also need to understand the process surrounding how teams become self-managed over time. Zawacki and Norman (1994) suggest that successful self-managed teams evolve through five stages. These are:

1. The typical hierarchical structure where the leader provides one-on-one supervision;
2. The leader evolves into a group manager whose role is making the transition into team coordinator/coach;
3. The group manager becomes the team coordinator and provides a structure for self-managed team members to receive the necessary training to take on more leadership tasks;
4. The team assumes most of the duties previously reserved for the group manager, who now becomes a boundary interface; and
5. The group manager is a resource for the team.

According to Zawacki and Norman (1994), a typical organization can have self-managed teams in each of these five stages at various times. Teams can revert to earlier stages as team membership changes over time. A team may also operate in a different stage in each of the seven roles. For example, a team could be performing Stage 3 responsibilities within the role “accomplishing the work” and Stage 1 responsibilities within the role “participating in organization-wide strategies.”

### **Challenges of Self- Directed Teams**

One challenge in forming a self-directed team is delegating the managerial authority and responsibility among the members of the team. Team members are not eager to take responsibility for the decisions that are previously taken by the managers (Tata and Prasad; 2004).

As a result of this unwillingness to take the responsibility (which is the foundational aspect of the self-directed teams) is not satisfied. Consequently, self-directed teams could not be formed.

To be a self-directed team, a long journey that should be taken by both the members of the self-directed team and the management. Team members should be trained for working effectively in a team, developing skills for problem-solving and decision making. They should also learn fundamental managerial skills to manage the processes that they developed to for their work (Williams;1995).

Furthermore, members of self-directed teams should also learn other team member’s job to plan their work, resolve differences and to make decisions by working together (Williams; 1995). For these reasons, forming a self-directed team is a challenge in terms of the time it needs to be formed within a company.

Individual commitment to a common goal of the team could be another challenge in self-directed teams (Moe et al; 2009). Since the team setup consists of members that are committed to works in which they

are specialized, they automatically give higher priority to their tasks rather than team-level tasks (Moe et al; 2009).

Another reason for the lack of individual commitment is unclear task completion criteria, which causes team members to not completing the task properly (Moe et al; 2009). Lastly, meetings are not good environments for discussion and obtaining team commitment, because; after assigning a task to a team member by the team leader, other members of the team think that the discussion is irrelevant for them and they will not listen to the rest of the discussion (Moe et al; 2009). Therefore, those problems should be resolved to establish individual commitment within the team.

To remain self-directed as a team, teams must be able to learn how to change the operating norms and rules within the team (Moe et al; 2009). Self-directed teams should have the essential level of team autonomy to improve its internal processes and applying the new techniques from their continuous learning (Moe et al; 2009).

Failure to learn causes self-directed teams to struggle in adapting the operating norms and the environment, and that eventually be a vital challenge for self-directed teams.

Decentralizing the decision-making process is one of the challenges for the members of self-directed teams. Since team members are used to the centralized decision-making process, they have difficulties aligning decisions on the operational level to team level, and as a result, other team members have no idea about what other team members are doing (Moe et al; 2009).

Moreover, the old habits of team leaders/managers could make them take many decisions and not letting the team decide by themselves (Moe et al; 2009). Also, identifying who should involve the decision-making process is another issue for self-directed teams (Moe et al; 2009).

Sharing resources of the multiple self-directed within the company is a challenge for self-directed teams (Moe et al; 2009). This case is more important for the organization that has a specialized culture, in which there is no other team member that can do or at least can assist the work to be done in the absence of the responsible team member.

Unnecessary amounts of organization control level on self-directed teams could be a threat to self-management (Moe et al; 2009). To protect the self-directed team and to try to keep the support of the management, team members and leader could cover up the problems within the team by applying impression management (Moe et al; 2009). To this end, organizations should lessen their controls over the self-directed teams to establish a suitable environment for self-directed teams.

Having each member in the team as a specialist on one task could be another challenge for self-directed teams (Moe et al; 2009). As it is discussed earlier, the absence of a specialized member in the team without a substitute, who can continue his work in his absence, could negatively affect the productivity of the team. Moreover, this specialization problem of self-directed teams could have an impact on shared commitment within the team (Moe et al; 2009).

## **How to develop self-managed teams?**

Self-managing teams are best formed with individuals who have different perspectives and backgrounds. Each individual offers value to the team. Through daily standups and code reviews, team members constantly collaborate.

Productivity increases and they become successful (or not) as a team. As a leader, you will need to learn how to step back and trust that the team will make the appropriate decisions. This is not an easy thing to do, but it can be very rewarding for you and your team in the long run.

This type of approach also encourages innovation. In an agile approach, continuous improvement and innovation are important. Every team is unique, and every data

environment is unique. As a result, the team should define what works for them, and not be afraid to experiment.

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