

Interventions: Team

SHIFTS AND SEMI-AUTONOMOUS TEAMS

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Ellen Loy had to decide on how to proceed with a major project in which she was involved. Ellen worked for Temple Corporation, a high-tech manufacturing organization, as a team development specialist in the Organization Development (OD) department. Her OD department was part of the Human Resource organization that supported Temple's newest factory. The factory management had decided to change the operations structure for the factory to semiautonomous teams. As a team development specialist, Ellen had been assigned the task of designing and developing the interventions and programs that were needed to help make the organizational change to manufacturing teams a successful reality.

Background

Temple's newest factory was the largest and most modern of its kind in the world. The square footage of the facility covered about 200,000 square feet and was five stories high. After a year of production, the facility was to employ 2,500 people plus 1,000 outside contractors. The various departments that provided service support to the factory (HR, Training, Finance, Engineering, Materials, etc.) employed an additional 1,000 people. The factory's finished product revenue rate was to be greater than one million dollars per hour.

The factory was a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week operation. There were four shifts that covered the 24/7 operations. Each shift was 12 hours in length. Night shifts were from 6:00 pm until 6:00 am. Day shifts were from 6:00 am until 6:00 pm. All factory personnel were expected to be on the factory floor 15 minutes before the start of their shift in order to receive production updates from the outgoing shift. There were four shifts:

- Shift 2 – Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday nights; every other Saturday night
- Shift 3 – Sunday, Monday, and Tuesdays; every other Wednesday
- Shift 4 – Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday nights; every other Saturday night
- Shift 5 – Thursday, Friday, and Saturdays; every other Wednesday

The manufacturing process involved six steps that the product had to go through. The factory was organized around these steps so that manufacturing supervisors and technicians worked in one of six functional areas. On each shift, each functional area was staffed by an average of 60 technicians. Technicians were hired into the organization as Level A Operations Technicians. Level A involved operating a specific tool(s). Technicians had to go through a training program to become certified to operate the tool. This certification time could be from four to eight weeks, depending on the tool. Level B certification involved higher order problem solving skills and could mean a specialization in operations, equipment repair, or process planning. After approximately two years in the factory, technicians could move on to Level C certification. Training at this level integrated knowledge, skills, and abilities from the previous

two levels of certification. This was the most rigorous level of certification and generally required nine months.

The technicians reported to the manufacturing supervisors. There were three supervisors for each functional area on each shift. This meant that there were 18 supervisors in the factory during each shift and that each functional area was supported by a total of 12 supervisors. There were a total of 72 supervisors in the factory organization.

The manufacturing supervisors reported to the Shift Managers. Each shift had two shift managers. The organization called this “Dual Leadership” management and used it at several different management levels. A type of job sharing situation, the purpose was to balance work load and provide a method for developing new managers. Although the shift managers worked together, one shift manager focused on personnel issues, and the other shift manager focused on strategic production issues. The shift managers reported to the Manufacturing Managers. There were two manufacturing managers for the factory (also “Dual Leadership”), and they worked a traditional 8:00 – 5:00 shift (called Shift 1).

Each shift was also supported by two training supervisors. Whereas the manufacturing supervisors reported to the manufacturing organization, the training supervisors reported to the training department. The responsibility of the training supervisors was to coordinate training. This included certification training, safety training, and providing support for OD interventions.

Culture

There were a number of factors that influenced the culture in the factory organization. Half of the supervisors and technicians working in the new factory were experienced Temple employees who had been employed in other Temple factories. To meet staffing needs, a large number of technicians and supervisors had been hired from outside the company. Technicians were recruited from two-year technical schools and the military. Manufacturing supervisors were required to have a four-year college degree. The majority of new supervisors were recent college graduates with minimal manufacturing experience and minimal management experience.

The current performance review process was very competitive. Employee reviews considered the employee’s production levels, amount of training they accomplished, whether they’ve met pre-established development and performance goals, and feedback from co-workers and customers. In reality, employees were punished for working in teams because their key performance indicators were based on individual accomplishments.

Each shift has its own personality. The majority of technicians working on Shift 2 were single, younger people. The shift managers had made it a fun, enjoyable environment, and the functional areas worked together to meet shift goals. There was a great deal of socializing outside of work. Shift 4 was comprised of mostly married people so there was less camaraderie among technicians and less outside socializing than there was on Shift 2. The shift managers on shift 4 did not promote working together, and there were a lot of situations where people did not get along. The functional areas competed with each other. Both of the night shifts were very independent. They enjoyed more freedom than the day shifts because of the absence of Shift 1

people “breathing down their necks.” The night shifts had to rely on each other more because there were no experts to call in for help during the middle of the night.

The day shifts (Shifts 3 and 5) dealt with a lot of different people who were on Shift 1. Engineers, contractors, automation technicians, and training personnel were constantly coming and going. There were more non-production people in the factory during the day. The day shifts had to juggle numerous testing requests from engineering, which often affected production outputs. The plus side of this was that, when there was a process or equipment issue, engineering was available for troubleshooting. Technicians on the day shift showed a lot of allegiance to the groups in which they worked.

Among the technicians, the experienced technicians demonstrated more initiative and confidence on the job and were very savvy in the culture of the organization. The new technicians who had been hired from the technical schools were more hesitant and less confident, and didn't have a great deal of work experience. The new technicians who had been hired from the military possessed valuable work experience but struggled with the environment. They were used to being in a highly directed work environment and working within a strict hierarchy.

When the factory started up, it was up to the supervisors to run production by being very directive with the technicians who reported to them. It was obvious from the start that this situation wouldn't work. Due to the fast pace, supervisors had no time for training or development. They experienced a huge culture shock coming from a college environment and were expected to prove themselves by working long hours and giving up personal time. A majority of the new supervisors experienced poor relationships with the experienced technicians because of their inexperience in the “real world.” Some supervisors, especially on the night shifts, focused too much on being friends with the technicians they supervised. The supervisors were struggling with how to break up the work among themselves in their functional areas. With three supervisors for each area, they were currently splitting the technicians on their shift into three groups. The supervisors felt that the technicians should be more involved in the daily operation decisions. There was concern among the supervisors about the high amount of competition between the shift and the functional areas. The turnover rate among supervisors was on the rise.

The manufacturing organization had not had a close relationship with the training or OD departments in the past. Manufacturing had a reputation for bullying other support organizations, such as automation, engineering, and materials. Communication among the different organizations was poor. Much of this could be attributed to the intense stress of starting up a new factory and the push to meet production goals.

In the daily operation meeting between factory management and managers of the support organizations, the OD manager was a visible and active participant. Although considered to be somewhat of an outsider (since she came from the HR side of the business), she was well respected and trusted by the management team.

The Change

Although the factory was starting up with a culture that had worked for past factories, the leadership of this factory wanted a culture change. They wanted to see more cohesion among functional areas and less competition. The belief was that teams could:

- Make more rapid production decisions by reducing dependence on outside resources
- Make better decisions as they were more familiar with the process and equipment and because they were closer to the issues
- Assimilate new team members more effectively

The factory management was willing to support the change to teams with time and money. They called on the OD organization to help make this change a reality. As a team development specialist, Ellen had a lot of work to do.