

THE GROUP AND THE TEAM IN MILITARY ORGANIZATION

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Abstract:

The paper includes introductory information regarding the group in the military organization as well as some conceptual assignation regarding the working groups and teams, their types and finally the designation of the group, its training and its reconstruction.

The most ancient and largely spread classification of the work group stipulates their differentiation according to the degree of formality and the type of relations among its members.

According to such a classification we have on the one hand the formal groups, and the informal groups on the other. The former ones are organized after norms, laws and regulation established in an official manner.

Another distinction will be made on the principle considered by some others essential for the increase of work performance. Levine and Moreland thought that the degree of ability belonging to the team members (ability is defined as the mixture between autonomy and power) represents such a fundamental criterion which may explain the higher or lower performance in each situation.

A simple specification of the types of groups and working teams has revealed a series of characteristics. Still, a more developed psychosocial analysis would be imposed as a necessity. Although we do not give up to the distinction made between group work and team work, the term group work will be preferred in the following pages because of its greater use among the specialist of the psychological and psycho organizational literature.

Keywords: officer, military leader, captain, competence, sub unit.

JEL Classification: M12

INTRODUCTION

The idea of group has always fascinated the thinkers, disregarding the fact that these were psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, ethnologists and so on. Trying to define or to difference the groups from other types of human communities (the crowd, the horde, the gang), as well as studying their psychology has left a mark in the history of psychology or sociology, especially in the case of social psychology.

Freud used to talk about collective psychology. Le Bon about the crowd's psychology, but both had in mind the psychological forces that master and stimulate the human actions and interactions. Despite the studies undertaken throughout time, the concept of group has remained a confusing one or, as two authors said a while back, it has remained "the most confusing" (Anzieu, Martin), for the French language, at least.

As the papers for social psychology indicate (Aebischer, Leclerc, Golu, Neculau) things didn't get better with the passing of the time; on the contrary, the situation has become more and more difficult. The confusion has increased because, together with the general concept for group, other concepts appeared, like that of nominal group, experimental group, diagnostics group. Recently, other concepts appeared, like: task group, work group, labor group and work team.

Out of all these we are interested only in the last two, if we are to choose the perspective of the organizational – managerial psychology. Our concerns with these two terms are the following: to insist upon conceptual delimitation, to create a psycho – social description of the work groups, and then to focus on the problems connected with practical actions undertaken in connection with work groups, namely designing and formation actions, and finally, their reconstruction.

CONCEPTUAL DELIMITATION

The concept of team has been created by Leavitt, who promoted the idea that the team represents the core unit of an organization. Leavitt also talked about the team – organization. In the opinion of some French authors, this idea “illustrates the mental and organizational revolution that demanded the structuring of work and organization around and through the team, the teams being the ones that are formed, evaluated, rewarded, promoted or laid off. The interest for the team, which is seen as a main unit in the functioning of an organization, has increased throughout time. Many organizations resorted to conducting team work, and this idea isn’t seen anymore as a source or manifestation of organizational problems, as it happened with Hawthorne, but as solutions to many organizational problems, including the ones that are related to productivity.

But what is the difference between groups and teams in an organization? For some authors, there is no real difference between the two terms. Daft and Guzzo indicated that the only difference comes from the context in which these two are used.

So, the concept of group is frequently used by psychologists and it has its origin in the research connected with the structure, the processes and the dynamic of groups undertaken by social psychology, whereas the concept of team is encountered only in the business context. As it results, the two concepts are interchangeable.

Jean – Francois Leroy has the same point of view: the reading technical and theoretical papers that founded the movement of organizational development, and articles about the psychological and social changes that occur in organizations, indicates the interchangeability of the concepts of group and team.

This happens because theoreticians and consultants want to indicate the fact that the primary unity of the organizational system is the group-team, and not the individuals. Also, the resort to the two interchangeable concepts has to do with the fact that they can prove a team’s superiority over the individual’s or even over a number of persons that work individually. With the passing of time, most authors tried to find some different elements between the two concepts.

Roger Mucchielli, who published a book entitled “*Le travail en equipe*”, indicates in the first pages that the team is a typical primary group that dominates the spirit’s unity, cohesion, the inter-human connections, personal commitment, the members’ adhesion to a group, with which they can identify, the convergence of efforts to carry out certain tasks, activity that leads, in the end, to common work.

But guessing that the team cannot be totally lapped over the primary group, Mucchielli tries to identify in it a series of distinctive notes in contrast with the work group. To situate the teams on a continuous unclear of what we understand through the concept of group, he recurs to the groups’ classification based on the phases/stages of group development.

He classifies the following types of groups: the nominal groups or pseudo-groups are formed from a conglomerate of persons united together by an external force; merged groups based on interpersonal trust; groups with conflicts that guide their existence after the concept of tension; unitary groups with members that find solutions or fulfill tasks; these groups concentrate their actions around the idea of personal commitment and co-responsibility at work.

Mucchielli says that the work team is part of the unitary groups’ category. Making the distinction between the groups focused on tasks and the ones focused on themselves, Mucchielli indicates that the teams are equally oriented towards the task and themselves. Anyway, the teams are sensitive groups, a group extracting its sensitivity from its vigilance, on the one hand, and on the other hand from the group’s intensity of reaction at any external intervention on the task and the group’s composition.

The members of sensitive groups show loyalty towards the group, personal commitment and identification with the group. The idea is that the team is little more than a simple group, it being clearly focused on relationships' and the need of performance.

Before Mucchielli, another French psychologist wrote: "The team strives to create mediation between two basic humane desires: the wish for efficiency and the wish for privacy, for affective communication". In the same year, in another paper (*La dynamique des groupes*), Maisonneuve wrote that the concept of team included terms such as enthusiasm, collective effort, solidarity, and sometimes magical invocation, fact that causes its use in the conjunctive ("we must promote a real team").

The years 1980-1990's bring new specifications when it comes to making a distinction between the concepts of group and team. The team is thought to be something more than a group of people that have a common objective, and the superiority of the term is given by the individual contributions that are considered to be complementary.

He noted that a team is good, in the sense of efficient, "if its members can work as a team even when they aren't together, thus contributing to a sequence of activities than to a common task that requires their presence in a certain place or at a certain moment in time". For most authors, the group is a gathering of two or more people that interact with each other by sharing tasks that have a common purpose, and the distinction between a group and simple gathering of people is done through interaction and inter-relationship. And the team is a group, but it is a particular type of group because it has three specific properties:

- The members' action is interrelated and coordinated
- Each member has a private role that is specified
- There are common purposes and objectives

Two French authors give us an exact definition for the concept of team. They write that the team is a formal regrouping that has a specific work which is well-defined in a given space, with inter-member and inter-team connections that are mainly prescribed by the organization. (Savoie, Mendes)

The attributions considered essential for team work are:

- The existence of a social system perceived as an entity of members and by any known observer with this system;
- The respective social system is complete, but when it comes to completing purposes its roles are different and inter-dependent;
- The system is collectively responsible for one or more tasks; the fulfillment of these tasks help to evaluate the system;
- The system operates in an environment that has expectations from it.

Out of all these, the last two attributes are the ones that differentiate the team from the group: it is about the existence of rights and duties in regard with the environment and about the collective responsibility of the engendered results. These two characteristics stop the transfer of the data from the field of group dynamic over the work teams.

The debate of the distinction between work group and the work team has the following conclusion: all the work teams are groups, but not all groups are work teams. Work team is a particular kind of group that falls in the same category with the committees, taskforces, departments and boards. The team is a group, but the group cannot be a team (Johnson, Johnson). A group consists of people working together, but who can easily work one without each other. A team is a group of people who can't work, at least not efficiently, without the other members of their team (Spector).

The groups are defined by Mc Shane and Von Glinow as "assemblies of persons that are in a unique relationship". From this point of view, all teams are groups because they have people with

unique relations, but not all groups are teams –because the teams have people that are held together through their interdependence and their need to collaborate in order to achieve the common purposes (McShane, Von Glinow).

Bigger or smaller differences between the group and the work team are encountered with other authors (Gibson, Ivancevich, Donnelly, Muchinsky). Another interesting point of view is given by Katzenbach and Smith who don't include the team in the generic assembly constituted by the work groups.

Having as a starting point two axes (a team's level of efficiency and the impact on performance), the two authors establish five types of groups versus teams: the work groups, the pseudo-team, the potential team, the authentic team, and the high performance team. The first two prove to have the same impact over the concept of performance if the result of work has the same quality; the potential team surpasses the work group in terms of efficiency; the authentic team and the high performance team are higher than the two axes. That differentiates the work team and the work group is the final result and the nature of responsibilities. "A work group is based on the individual contributions of the members that lead to a product of collective work" (Katzenbach, Smith). The two authors make it clear that the choice is between group work and team work.

More important than the distinction between the group work and the team work is the underlining of another idea, namely refreshing the research in the field of work teams: "even though the team represents one of the oldest social technologies of production and from this point of view doesn't know any revolutionary aspect, it gets special attention from the researchers in the administration of human resources".

How can we explain this? Certain authors (Shea, Guzzo) believe that the explanation is the great importance that teams have in the working environments. Other authors appeal to the idea of efficiency: "The current enthusiasm for team work in organizations reflects a deeper recognition of the fact that this way of work offers the promise of a more rapid progress than the one obtained through individual action or through the mechanistic approach of work" (West, Borril, Unsworth).

One has to also take into consideration that team work (or group work) is favorable both for the organization and the individual. Handy enumerates ten reasons that convince organizations to use team work, group work or committee work (to assign work; to manage and control work; to resolve issues and take decisions; to process information; to inform and collect ideas; to test and confirm decisions; for coordination and connections; to increase the employment rate and the sense of involvement; to negotiate and solve conflicts; to benefit from past experience).

In their turn, the individuals use teams, groups, committees to: satisfy their social needs of affiliation; to mark the limits of their own self-concept; to obtain support and help in the accomplishment of their own objectives; the distribution and help in a common activity like: the achievement of a product; the accomplishment of a task; fun; support; creation (Handy).

Two French authors recently said that there are at least three reasons that determine the managers to build work teams: team work improves individual efficiency; it improves the efficiency of the production unities; it improves the global efficiency of organizations.

TYPES OF WORK GROUPS AND TEAMS

The oldest and best known classification of work groups foresees their distribution as a consequence of the degrees of formality and distribution of the relationships between members. This classification creates the formal groups arranged by norms, laws, official regulations and informal groups, generated by the psychological, inter-subjective relationships between members.

The first two are created by an authority, whereas the others appear as a consequence of the socio-affective preferences that the members have for each other; the formal groups are also called

the official ones, and the informal groups are called the unofficial. In the specialized books there are various subcategories of the two main groups.

So, the formal groups are divided into command groups (leadership groups), their main task being to coordinate and organize other people's activity; and task groups focused on task accomplishment.

The informal groups are subdivided into interest groups and friendship groups, their main stimulating agent being slightly different – the interest as motivation, and friendship with its sympathetic and social-affective touch (Greenberg, Baron, Gibson Ivancevich, Donnelly).

Another classification of work groups, specific for the organizational environments, is proposed by Sales and it starts from the technologic system of production. He establishes four types of work groups, namely:

- The lethargic group (little performance; underpaid; the members are poorly trained; activities without interaction, fact which generates the group's lack of enthusiasm and internal unity; there is no established leader).
- The erratic group (with members that have poor professional training, low social standards; the tasks don't vary and the work is based on physical effort; the interactions between members are confusing, unpredictable, the cohesion is occasional; their leaders often create conflicts).
- The strategic group (its members are well prepared, well paid, fact which makes them feel secure; the work tasks are individual, but have a higher degree of human interaction; the group has internal unity, and its members are active, influential, with a great desire to participate).
- The conservatory group (its members are highly qualified, with a high social status; it is characterized through individual system of operation, various dispersion in the organization, low level of interaction, but a strong sense of identity; it has a reasonable level of internal unity; its members tend to be conservative during negotiations, but exercise great pressure on the accomplishment of the specific objectives).

Sayle's classification gives us three conjugated criteria:

- The hierarchical level (to carry out certain tasks and to lead)
- Profession (qualified or unqualified work)
- A group's distinctive characteristics as psychosocial unity (the members' frequency of interaction; the degree of cohesion; the awareness or unawareness of group unity).

The organizational culture gives us the opportunity to adapt a new typology of work groups. Allcorn had four types of groups (homogenous, institutionalized, autocrats, intentional), the first three being part of the offensive groups, and the last of the non-offensive groups. In Allcorn's opinion the offensive groups are the ones that offer protection and collective or individual defense against anxiety that is a result of group affiliation, while the non-offensive groups are considered to be desirable at the work place, and are characterized through the members' participation in a non-offensive way.

Recent classifications of work groups add new varieties to the groups and they are, in fact, particularizations of the ones already presented. So, Mullins talks about task and technological groups, managerial or decision-taking groups. The typology of the work groups is also extremely varied. Two of these typologies draw our attention, first because they are specific to the organizational environments, and second because, in one way or another, they are going to be taken over and continued by other authors.

The first typology is the one suggested by Larson and La Fasto: teams that can work out problems, creation and tactical teams. The first are formed when the organization is dealing with a problem and it must be solved urgently and economically. Their task is to find as many solutions as

possible, so that the organization can choose the best one. The creation teams are approximately the same as the solution teams; the only difference between the two is that the first ones are focused on discovering new and original solutions.

The tactical teams have as a task to carry out well defined plans. To accomplish such an objective, the tasks must be well defined, and the members' roles must be unambiguous. The three types of work teams are different through the originality of the created product (some provide unoriginal solutions, some provide original and creative solutions), through the degree of involvement (some only think or create the solutions, whereas others are a direct part of their practical construction).

Another typology of work teams is inspired by the criterion considered by some authors as being essential to the augmentation of work performance. Levine and Moreland think that the degree of habilitation of the members of a work team – habilitation is seen as the mixture between autonomy and power – represents the basic criterion that explains the high or low performances of work teams.

Sundstrom and its partners, took into consideration the teams' habilitation degree, and came up with four types of teams: traditional, advisory, on-the-spot, semi-autonomous. The traditional work teams are created by a leader, to which the other members have to report directly; as a consequence, the relationships between members are discontinuous; also, there is no interaction in the accomplishment of common objectives (if these exist). The advisory work teams are enriched with the power to recommend solutions for the organizational problems, especially for the technical ones.

Their solutions are put forward to the hierarchical forums that analyze them, after which they accept or deny them. The on-the-spot work teams are created when there is a need to find solutions for problems; such teams have the power of decision, obviously, in the limits of a mandate determined by time. They establish their own way of organization, in order to find solutions for the given problems.

The semi-autonomous work teams are made up of interconnected members that are collectively responsible for the planning and control of work; these teams are assisted by a coordinator that assures the link with the organization. The teams are responsible for results. We can observe that the two criteria – the autonomy and the power degrees of the members and of the team as a whole – increase as we go up from the traditional teams that are improperly called teams, to the semi-autonomous teams, included in the organizational structures that take decisions. Then, while the traditional teams have as a main function the fulfillment of tasks, even though they aren't included in the organization's hierarchical – linear structures, the advisory ones, even though they aren't integrated in the organization's hierarchical – linear structures, must respect a standard protocol to find solution for problems.

As for the on-the-spot teams these are included in the so-called matrix structures, at the end of the hierarchical line. Their products risk not to be chosen the organization's leadership.

Instead of the concept of semi-autonomous team, some authors prefer to call them self-managed, self-leaded, self-designed, sometimes with the interchangeable use of all these terms; at other times, with the specification that there is strict difference between these terms. For example, the self-designed teams are responsible for their definition as work teams, they decide the way to accomplish certain tasks and decide how to accomplish them.

The self-managed teams choose their leaders, carry out the tasks, but are autonomous when it comes to organizing work. There are authors that associate autonomy with work "enriching" or "widening". For example, when a work team integrates its functions on the support ones (maintaining, receiving, and sending) it becomes connected with the other teams, fact that makes her to be considered as semi-autonomous, even though it has an immediate leader.

We indicated previously that there are authors that take again the old classifications. Daft refers to the self-leaded teams; Lemoine indicates a new series of tasks, like: taking part in process of creating objectives; deciding the production objectives; the connection between the individual expectations and the collective purposes – all these tasks create new types of work teams; Mc Shane and Von Glinow enumerate the teams based on organizational structures, the self – leadership ones and even the virtual teams, which lose in the process a great deal of their private nature.

The plain enumeration of the work teams and groups has underlined a series of their characteristics. We consider that a more detailed characterization is necessary. Even though we don't let go to the idea of difference between the work groups and teams, we continue to believe in the concept of work that is highly used in the psychosocial and psycho-organizational literature.

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