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Team Building: Bridging the Gap

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ABSTRACT

One of the most important aspects of any organization is that its employees function effectively as a team. This is especially important in law enforcement where an individual's safety often depends on the cooperation of their co-workers. Often in law enforcement, officers tend to form cliques within their work shift or division. This mentality can lead to animosity and competitiveness, which is contrary to the team approach and detrimental to the organization as a whole.

This research paper, by review of the literature, the use of surveys, and interviewing officers from several agencies, shows the following:

- That animosity tends to exist between work shifts and work divisions;
- That the stress of shift work has an adverse effect on team building;
- That the majority of employees surveyed believe rewards should be tied to performance.

The University of Texas Medical Branch Police Department, which employs the use of overlapping shifts and gain sharing, was used as a model. The results of the research indicate that employees do distinguish themselves based on their individual work groups. However, when overlapping of shifts and gain sharing are utilized, individuals feel the organization functions as a unified team with positive outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Police departments are rarely viewed by the public in terms of the divisions and work shifts that compose the entire department. Instead, when the nightly news or newspaper headlines lay blame for excessive use of force or civil rights' violations, they do not differentiate whether the officer is in a suit or in a uniform. The entire department accepts responsibility for the actions of its individuals, and is viewed as a whole by outside observers. This, however, rarely appears to be the case when officers assign blame amongst themselves for a poor job or for incomplete assignments.

Much research has been done in the area of team building in law enforcement as well as other vocations. Law enforcement and some other vocations share the responsibility of providing coverage around-the-clock, thus necessitating the need for shift work. Law enforcement in larger departments has specialty work groups that become distinguished from the main body. Attempts have been successful in getting people who work on the same shift or specialty shifts to work together as a team. Research and interviews indicate that getting these shifts and divisions to "bridge the gap," by working as one and accepting responsibility as one, is a great deal more difficult.

This paper will attempt to answer four specific questions with regards to team building:

1) Does animosity exist between different units within the organization and can it be overcome? 2) Does animosity exist between different work shifts within the same division of the organization and can this be put aside and replaced with a one-team philosophy? 3) Do physical and psychological factors, such as the time of day worked and physical surroundings, contribute to feelings of animosity between different groups? and, 4) Do pay incentives, based

on team performance, lead to better cooperation between individuals and make the organization more effective?

The following methodologies will be used to address the above questions:

- Research in books and journals already published;
- Interviews with other officers and surveys sent out to different police departments and possibly other vocations; and,
- An example of how The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston Police Department has attempted to overcome officer separation.

It is expected that research will show the answer to these questions to be "yes." By using various shift configurations, different terminology, and leadership decisions, this paper will attempt to prove that compartmentalization of the organization can be overcome.

The idea of top-level leadership and the public holding entire organizations responsible for their performance is not a new philosophy. Numerous organizational benefits could be realized if individual members would think with an organizational perspective-not in terms of an individual unit. Much could be gained with this broader outlook: morale would increase, accountability would rise, and the overall effectiveness of the organization would increase.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Most police departments, even very small ones, are to some extent made up of different units. Large and mid-sized departments tend to have several areas of specialization while small departments still have the separation between the line worker and the leader. In organizations that have several distinct specialized units, it appears that relevant micro environments as represented by differential work group and shift assignments may provide important contextual reference for the assessment of different stressors. Simply stated, participation in specialized

groups or different shifts may affect individuals' perceptions of their ability to perform their role effectively and thereby the perceived magnitude of different stressors (Parasuraman and Alutto 1981). A natural competitiveness seems to occur due to the fact that employees selected to participate in specialized units are perceived to be higher achievers. Separation of workers into different type work and work schedules also tends to bond together individuals working within the same unit (Parasuraman and Alutto 1981). Research has indicated that attitudes and perceived work characteristics differ more in those who work in different units than in those working the same job on different shifts (Petersen 1985).

Working together as a team is important both on the shift and between the shifts and is important for building morale. The action of one employee not only affects the specific unit the employee is assigned to, but also affects the operation of the entire department. Additionally during emergency situations requiring more than one officer, each must act as a team member to accomplish his/her duties (Boxerbaum 1988). Researchers, however, suggest that each shift has characteristics that make them both a separate subsystem and part of an organizational system (Peterson 1985).

Could some of the competitiveness and animosity felt between shifts be overcome by supervisors who are held accountable for the performance of the entire department instead of a subunit? Parasuraman and Alutto (1981) held that a lack of close supervision correlated with interunit conflict. It is important for supervisors to know that if negative attitudes on the part of one shift affects overall performance, it could be the result of changeable characteristics of the department (Peterson 1985).

IN 1967, Dr. Rensis Likert expressed that highly effective work groups that overlapped with each other made the greatest use of human capacity. Police departments, especially those

working ten-hour shifts, utilize this philosophy. Does working off hours affect employees personalities and well being to the point they would isolate themselves both personally and professionally from their coworkers? Police serve the public twenty-four hours a day and in a variety of ways. This necessitates the need for rotating shifts (O'Neil 1986).

In 1971, Randall Dunham stated that most of the literature he had reviewed showed the majority of shift worker problems were possibly due to workers being "out of phase" with both the established social and psychological cycles. Normal social cycles revolve around people working what is considered day shift. Working off shifts limits recreational activity and could also limit interpersonal relationships. Does this tend to give the worker an "us versus them" attitude and limit the ways they can escape psychologically from the work environment? In a survey conducted by Frost and Jamal (1979), results indicated that day shift workers appeared to be better off emotionally and perceptually than workers on other shifts. The lack of emotional well being in shift workers could also lead to an increased number of disturbances in their family lives, therefore, contributing to attitudinal problems at work (Dunham 1976).

Finally, does team- based compensation and rewards lead to a greater spirit of unity and accountability within the organization? If organizations reward individual behavior, employees will concentrate on individual achievement instead of group outcome (Orsburn, Moran, Musselwhite, Zenger 1990). In some cases, employees rewarded on an individual basis may try to improve the perception of their performance at the expense of other employees (Nelson 1994). In this case, group incentives could reduce the natural rivalry and promote cooperation among employees (Pritchard). One type of incentive is commonly referred to as "gain sharing" (Wellins, Byham, Wilson, 1981) In gain sharing, a baseline of acceptable results is established. Compensation is then based on accomplishments performed by the team that either meets or

exceeds these results (Orsburn, Moran, Musselwhite, Zenger, 1990). One facet of team reward that is not appealing to the individual employee is that it tends to flatten the organization, thereby reducing the opportunities for promotion (Orsburn, Moran, Musselwhite, Zenger, 1990).

METHODOLOGY

Again, this paper will attempt to answer the questions: do employees who work different shifts and areas have animosity and natural competitiveness, and can various techniques and rewards be used to overcome these tendencies? Attempting to get people in an organization to realize that the actions of one reflect upon how the whole is perceived is no easy task. The vast majority of police supervisors and supervisors in other occupations, when asked by this researcher if animosities existed between different shifts and different units within the same organization, responded that they did.

In an effort to reach out to a broad group, surveys were sent to 35 different police departments across the state of Texas. The departments varied in size from four to 2000 officers; 60 surveys were sent out and 46 returned. That is approximately a 75 percent return rate. The surveys asked the following questions: 1) Type of shift worked; 2) If the shifts overlapped; 3) If animosity existed between the different shifts; 4) If animosity existed between the different divisions; 5) If pay for performance was given, and if not, would that be preferable to other type raises; and; 6) If the respondent felt like his department functioned as a team.

A separate survey, which asked basically the same questions, was administered to the officers of the University of Texas Medical Branch Police Department (UTMBPD). The UTMBPD works ten hour overlapping shifts. During a week's period, all patrol officer's work at least some time with all other patrol officers; 70 surveys were sent out and 51 were returned,

a 65% return rate. The intent of the survey given to the UTMB officers was to determine if working at least some time with all the other officers would give them a perception that they functioned more as a team. Only 16 of the 60 (26.7%) surveys sent out to other police departments indicated that their departments worked overlapping shifts.

The UTMBPD also administers a yearly employee satisfaction survey. The results of that survey both prior to and after the department instituted overlapping shifts will be covered. Money for pay raises for employees of the UTMBPD is based on certain team-based criteria. One of the questions the survey attempts to answer is whether pay for team performance motivates individuals to function as a team more than traditional across the board increases and individual merit pay. A similar survey that was given to the UTMBPD Officers was also given to a group of nurses who work at the University of Texas Medical Branch.

FINDINGS

One of the areas measured was the overall satisfaction of the employees. There were not enough of the outside agencies that did employee satisfaction surveys to give an accurate finding in that area. The University of Texas Medical Branch Support Services Division, under which the police department falls, has been doing employee satisfaction surveys since 1997. The 1997 survey showed an approximate 33% overall satisfaction rate. During this time the department worked a traditional 8-hour shift, 5 days on and 2 days off. The shifts rotated every 4 months. In 1998 the department moved to a 10-hour shift, 4 days on and 3 days off. The shifts also overlapped, and did not rotate. The employee satisfaction survey in 1998 showed an overall satisfaction rate of 66%, double that of the previous year. In 1999 and 2000 the overall employee satisfaction rose to 70% and 76% respectively. worked on the previous year. While the change in work hours was not the only reason for higher levels of employee satisfaction,

based on the following surveys a case can be made that the workers' morale did rise because of more stability in their work hours, more days off, and a greater sense of team because of the overlap.

SURVEYS

As stated before, three different groups were surveyed with regard to this paper. The following two questions were asked of all three groups who responded as indicated

Table #1: Does animosity exist between the different shifts within the same department?

	<u>POLICE OTHER THAN UTMB</u>	<u>UTMB POLICE</u>	<u>UTMB NURSES</u>
Yes	45%	71%	71%
No	55%	29%	29%

Table #2: Is there animosity between the different divisions with the department?

	<u>POLICE OTHER THAN UTMB</u>	<u>UTMB POLICE</u>	<u>UTMB NURSES</u>
Yes	50%	52%	71 %
No	50%	48%	29%

In response to the first question, "Is there animosity between shifts in the same department?", survey results would appear to indicate that a greater level of animosity exists between the UTMB work groups than outside agencies. However, this could be due to a flaw in how the survey was administered. The surveys given to the UTMB work groups were given to both supervisors and the rank and file. The surveys given to outside police agencies were given to supervisors only. It is possible that supervisor's perception of team work differs from how the subordinates perceive it.

UTMB Nurses work twelve-hour shifts. Their shifts do not overlap like the UTMB Police

Department's ten-hour shifts overlap. Out of the forty-six police departments other than UTMB, 15 had shifts that overlapped and out of those, seven stated that there was animosity between the shifts. Again these surveys included supervisors only.

The third survey question was given only to the members of the UTMB Police Department and the UTMB nurses.

Table #3: Do you feel that working evening or night shifts puts more stress on you personal life and physical health than working day shift?

	<u>POLICE OTHER THAN UTMB</u>	<u>UTMB NURSES</u>
Yes	57%	88%
No	43%	12%

The fourth survey question dealt with salary increases.

Table #4: Do you believe that pay raises should be based on performance, longevity, or both.

	<u>UTMB POLICE</u>	<u>UTMB NURSES</u>
Performance	67%	71%
Longevity	17%	1%
Both	16%	28%

The question asked of the outside police departments was different. It first asked if pay raises were given based on performance and, if not, the question was then asked if they would prefer that pay raises be given based on performance. Fifty Seven percent of the outside police departments say that pay raises were given based on performance and of the 43% who stated that raises were not based on performance, 71 % stated the preference would be that raises were based on performance.

The fifth question was given to UTMB Police and UTMB Nurses.

Table #5: Are cliques formed on the different shifts and do they hinder efficiency of the department?

	<u>UTMB POLICE</u>	<u>UTMB NURSES</u>
Yes	23%	71%
No	77%	29%

The last survey question was given to UTMB Police and Police Departments other than UTMB.

Table #6: Does your department function as a team?

	<u>UTMB POLICE</u>	<u>POLICE OTHER THAN UTMB</u>
Yes	81%	68%
No	19%	32%

As mentioned earlier the UTMBPD' salary increases are based on both team and individual performance. The Support Services Division under which the police department falls, sets at least two criteria for all divisions to meet. The Police Department then sets two standards in which the entire department must meet or exceed. The amount of money the department gets to give out as performance-based increases is based on whether the department as a whole meets these goals. If all goals are met, the department gets the maximum amount of money allotted by Support Services. If one or more of the goals is not met then money is deducted from the amount the department can award. In the case of the UTMB Police department, the goals for the past two years have been 1) For the amount of incident or offense reports returned to the officers for corrections be no more than 10%, and 2) The use of unscheduled sick leave be reduced by 5%. Both of these areas were deemed to be problem areas for the department. In the last two years both of the target goals showed improvement after being made part of the salary increase process. In the years 2000,3% of the reports were returned for corrections and in the year 2001, 8% of the reports were returned for corrections. Unscheduled sick leave was reduced

dramatically in those years, 20% in the year 2000 and 25% in 2001.

After receiving the money from the Support Services division based on the Department meeting their team goals, officers are awarded salary increases based on meeting their individual goals which had been set for them, based on discussions between themselves and their supervisors, and a process where their overall abilities are evaluated by all supervisors as a team. This is made possible because of the departments overlapping shifts and the fact that all supervisors work at least some time with all employees, thereby giving them a chance to provide input.

DISCUSSION

Again this paper attempted to answer four questions in regards to team building:

1. Does animosity exist between units within the organization?
2. Does animosity exist between work shifts within the same division, and can this be put aside and replaced with a one-team philosophy?
3. Do physical and psychological factors, such as the time of day worked and physical surroundings, contribute to feelings of animosity between groups?
4. Do pay incentives based on team performance lead to better cooperation between individuals and make the organization more effective?

This issue is based on research and interviews, which show that members of different shifts appear to accept less accountability when blame can be placed on another shift or division. It is hoped that by using different methods, the walls employees perceive between themselves and those in different work groups can come down; and they, as well as the public, will view the department as one entity.

In answer to the first question, the surveys indicate that animosity does exist between

different units within the same organization. The survey would indicate that, to a lesser extent, this occurs in police departments than it did in the nursing area surveyed. This could indicate that police departments view themselves as a team more than nurses. This could be a result of the necessary interaction between divisions in law enforcement, which occurs more frequently than in the different areas of nursing. As an example, a patrol officer in a police department would interact many times with the detective division in working a case. In nursing however, different areas such as pediatrics might rarely work with nurses in the adult units. The animosity would be explained by the fact that certain divisions in both police and nursing could construe themselves as " elite" divisions, such as the detective division in law enforcement or the trauma division in nursing, or as Parasuraman and Alutto stated " higher achievers."

In answer to question number two, there does appear to be a high amount of animosity between people who work different shifts. As was indicated earlier, there was a flaw in the survey; the survey given to police departments other than UTMB was directed at supervisors only. The perception of animosity by those departments was lower than that of the UTMB Police or UTMB nurses where the survey was given to both supervisory and line employees. This could, in itself, indicate that those most responsible for insuring teamwork do not see the issue as a problem. There is however no data to support that hypothesis. However, as Peterson stated, it does appear that each shift feels they are part of a separate subsystem of the organization.

The survey of UTMB Nurses indicated they felt that cliques formed within the shifts and adversity affected performance. UTMB Police indicated they did not feel that cliques were formed which hindered the job. However, in 2001 the UTMB Police management forced officers to switch shifts for that very reason. While this caused a slight downturn in

employee satisfaction, the move was felt to be necessary. Complaints against employees had risen dramatically, especially on the off shifts and it was determined that officers were covering up for each other. It was also felt that the closeness of supervision that Parasurem and Alutto had talked about was not there, thereby contributing to interunit conflict.

The formation of cliques may be largely a result of shift work. Both a majority of UTMB Police Officers and UTMB Nurses felt that working evening and night shifts put more stress on their physical and personal lives. As stated by Dunham, shift work puts workers "out of phase with established cycles." People who work evening and night shifts are more limited as with whom they can associate when they are not at work. This might have a tendency to force them to spend leisure time with the people who work the same shift that they do. Also a great many leisure activities that are available to people who work a day shift are not available to those who work the off shifts. This could possibly leave the contacts that an employee has at work as their only social interaction other than their families. It's quite possible they could be spending more time with coworkers than their own family. It would seem reasonable that this might affect their emotional well being. It is worth noting that every employee satisfaction survey given to the UTMB Police Department officers working the day shift advised they were more content with their work. The fact that employees working off shift do not have access to the same amount of off duty leisure, could cause animosity with those working a day shift.

The last question dealt with whether pay incentives based on team performance leads to better cooperation between individuals. Forty-three percent of the outside police departments stated that they did not get salary increases based on performance. Almost 2/3's of that 43 percent stated a preference or the performance-based increase. Most municipal agencies operate

under civil service agreements that provide for increases based on position and longevity. This system provides less incentive for personal or team based achievement. UTMB Police uses a form of the " gain sharing" talked about by Wellins, Byham, and Wilson. Baselines are first set, desired improvement by the department as a whole is required to increase available funds, and then individual achievement rewarded along with team achievement.

CONCLUSION

This study was undertaken because there appears to be a great deal of competition and animosity between people who work for the same law enforcement organization but are part of a separate subgroup. Results of prior research, surveys, and interviews conducted would indicate that this belief is correct. Different shifts or work groups appear to have a high degree of unity among themselves but definitely there seems to be a differentiation made by the employee between their subgroups and others.

The research seems to indicate very strongly that just the nature of shift work itself is a major cause of the differentiation. Limited social life and family stress caused by working off hour shifts seem to bond together those individuals working these shifts. This seems to occur not only in law enforcement but also in other professions, such as nursing. It would appear that shift work also has the natural tendency to form cliques among those who work it. This in turn could lead to an "us" attitude by employees working certain shifts or assignments. When questioned as to why there was animosity between different shifts and areas, various officers who worked for both UTMB and outside police departments, gave highly subjective answers. The most frequent of these answers was that the other work shifts or groups did not do their fair share of the work and that their own group had to work harder to insure the job got done.

However, regardless of the animosity and competition between the different work shifts and units, it appears that the overall "team mindset" can be ingrained. Eighty-one percent of the UTMB Police Officers felt that they functioned as a team because of the overlapped shifts. The UTMB Police Department had one of the highest employee satisfaction ratings in the university's system after the overlap had been initiated. The department also improved in customer satisfaction surveys for three years in a row after the overlap was initiated. At the same time the department's employees are motivated by the "gain sharing" where the different work shifts and areas are dependent upon each other's performance as well as their own for their rewards.

A more complete study would perhaps be possible had the surveys given to outside agencies reflected the views of both supervisory and line personnel. Additional questioning of employees as to exactly why they felt animosity existed between shifts might also have been helpful, however it would also have been highly subjective.

The key to an organization functioning as a team, is the realization by the employees that individual success is tied to team success. Officers can perform heroic acts, but if the department is viewed in a bad light or as being inefficient, individual accomplishments are not rewarded. People, cities, or organizations tasked with giving out money, do so based on organizational achievement. The term "clique" normally refers to something that hinders efficiency in an organization. However not all "cliques" are bad. When the entire department becomes one complete "clique" we will then have "bridged the gap" in team building.

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