

Pointing Fingers

This week was an interesting week to say the least. After taking a big hit to our shareholder value in the previous rollover, my team and I all worked especially hard to make sure that it did not happen again. We used the theory learnt from the previous week's reading and nitpicked our operations. We were absolutely positive that this would be our comeback. This result very nearly happened except for one thing. The figure that my operations manager had given me for the cost of goods sold was eight million dollars out, which resulted in a five million dollar loss and our shareholder value taking an even bigger hit. In two rollovers we had fallen from second place in our country to second to last.

The problem at hand is not to do with the hit to our shareholder value (focusing on that would be single loop learning), but with who was at fault. After speaking with my operations manager I discovered that there had been a miscommunication that had gone unnoticed for the whole semester. The figure that she had been giving me for her operations had been solely for her operations while I was under the impression that it was her cost of goods sold. At first I held her solely responsible. However after actually talking with her about it I remembered what I had written in my week seven reflection. In this reflection I had written about how I had realised "that even when things are going well, there is nearly always something that could have been done to make it even better". The point I was trying to make with this was that no matter what the problem is, at least some of the responsibility lies with myself. Had I clarified with my operations manager what exactly her figure was instead of assuming that she would know that cost of goods sold was the responsibility of the operations manager, we might still have taken the hit to our shareholder value but it wouldn't have been a surprise.

I don't feel that there's very much to write about the learning outcomes for this week as they are pretty simple. The root of the problem is not very deep and easily fixed. In order to stop this kind of mistake from happening again in the future simply requires that we specifically check that our understanding of our responsibility is clearer. If I were to take this course again I would do this right at the beginning and include it in our team agreement. The single loop solution to this problem would simply involve me saying that I won't make assumptions in the future about what people mean. I can't check what people mean every time they give me a figure so clarifying this at the beginning of the semester seems to be the double loop solution.

Aside from the learning outcome from using Daudelin's structure I felt as if I learnt two other things this week. I don't feel that it will result in a change of behaviour but after thinking about who was to blame for our poor performance, I feel as if I understand how teams work a little better than I did before. In a team it is very rarely (I don't want to say never) the case that a failure is one person's fault. I would say that in this instance both me and my operations manager are equally at fault for our teams poor performance. I would be very interested to know what the rest of my team would say if presented with the question that Argyris (1991) used as an example, "How can we be more effective in the future". I do not believe it is anyone else's fault but I wonder if they feel the same way. The second thing I learned was how difficult working through problems with a fellow team member can be. As I previously mentioned, we have been a relatively successful team up until the last two rollovers, so it was a new experience for me. Once we had clarified what I had thought the figure I had been given was, I felt as if my operations manager felt solely responsible for our teams poor performance. Her reaction made me feel as if I was telling her off, which is something that felt horrible to do to my team member and friend. It is somewhat comforting to know that it is normal to feel this way about the situation based on the paradox of roles (PeiPerl, (2001)) but it doesn't make it any easier. My only wish is that the next time I have to be in this situation it will be with a subordinate. At least then I will have the excuse of it being my job to deliver the bad news.

Sources

Argyris, C. (1991). *Teaching smart people how to learn. Reflections, 4*(2), 4–15

France, J. (2013). *Where Did I Go Wrong*

Peiperl, M. A. (2001). *Getting 360° feedback right. Harvard Business Review, 79*(1), 142--147