Chapter 11
Cross-Functional Teams in Support of Building Knowledge Capacity in Public Sector

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ABSTRACT

Dynamic environmental changes nowadays have led organizations to look for many ways to respond to those changes. With increasing competition in markets, management approaches have emerged that helped organizations survive. This chapter presents the concept of cross-functional teams which develops a knowledge-sharing network that transforms organizations from traditional hierarchy base to informational base, and how it supports building knowledge capacity inside public sector organizations. Members of cross-functional teams belong to different branches of knowledge, and therefore have different backgrounds. They cooperate until the required task is completed successfully. This chapter concluded that cross-functional teams support building knowledge capacities in organizations. Recommendations were suggested based on the findings.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations nowadays are undergoing major environmental changes, facing unprecedented challenges, pressures and opportunities in human history. This requires from organizations to adopt appropriate management approaches to survive in an environment full of change and intense competition. One of those new approaches is the teamwork. In the last three decades, May (1933) and his research group noted DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-9639-4.ch011
that productivity of individuals increased despite of changes in the environmental working conditions. They developed a collective identity among themselves, which led to this increased productivity. The results of this research were the first initiation of cross-functional teams. This topic went through several stages that led to greater autonomy for the team and their management (AL-Louzi, 2007). In the 1980s, According to (Khattab, 2004), the importance of using teams started in Japan using quality workshops and in Sweden using the self-managed teams, as well as in different organizations in America, Europe and all over the world that became linked to improving quality life in organizations. In this concern, teamwork is defined as group of individuals who contribute in the performance of the work required and each one of them is responsible for a specific part or function of this work. As a result, team members’ practices ease of performance and satisfaction. Another stream in this argument is that each member of the working group must know the role of others whom he deals with. It is also necessary for the member to be qualified to carry out the work assigned and to have the desire of dealing with other members in the scope of work.

In this context, one of the most effective approaches that showed up in modern organizations is the cross-functional teams as a solution for the increase of work problems (Badawi, 2009). Cross-functional teams (CFT), are based on diversifying the professional and functional backgrounds that make up the team. Team members are given the opportunity to exchange knowledge and expertise that do not fall within their specialties (Parker, 2003). Those teams are formed from various departments within the organization, where each individual specializes in the field of his work in the previous job, and here the focus is on the element of specialization to benefit from the work of the team (Conti, Kleiner, 1997).

Currently Knowledge is seen as a competitive advantage for organizations and one of its capitals, therefore deep knowledge exchange needs a manner that allows others to traverse the differences and boundaries of specialty areas between team members. Knowledge must be shared when team members in organizations communicate information to each other in a two-way communication to achieve the organizational goals.

With the increase of interest of cross-functional teams, public sector in Bahrain began to pay attention to the adoption of modern management systems such as teamwork. Especially that the public sector is the most important and strategic services sector affecting many fields for citizens of Bahrain. Hence, it is possible to identify the success of cross-functional teams approach to support building knowledge capacity in public sector in Bahrain.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Cross-Functional Teams

Cross-functional teams have eventually considered as an integrated approach to achieve organizational objectives. This was confirmed by (Donnellon, 1993) when he mentioned that the major distinctive feature of a cross-functional team is that the achievement of the team’s objectives is of the highest priority to its members. The members together interact and feel psychologically responsive to each other through a sense of belonging to a single team. This team consists of members from different sectors of the organization, and these teams are composed to solve complex problems. Cross-functional teams have become key players in organizations that want to succeed in today’s competitive business environment. In those circumstances, there are radical changes taking over such as: the tendency working in teams
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