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# TEAM EFFECTIVENESS: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN A MALAYSIAN ELECTRONICS FACTORY STRIVING TOWARDS EMPOWERED TEAMS

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## ABSTRACT

This study consists of two parts: Part one identifies the antecedents and outcomes of team effectiveness. A conceptual model is developed. The model has team effectiveness as the dependent variable and 6 antecedent variables namely leadership, skills/knowledge, rewards for participation, participative culture, structured activities, and team cohesiveness. Part two examines the variables of empowered teams.

## INTRODUCTION

A team is a group of people with a high degree of interdependence geared towards the achievement of a goal or completion of a task.

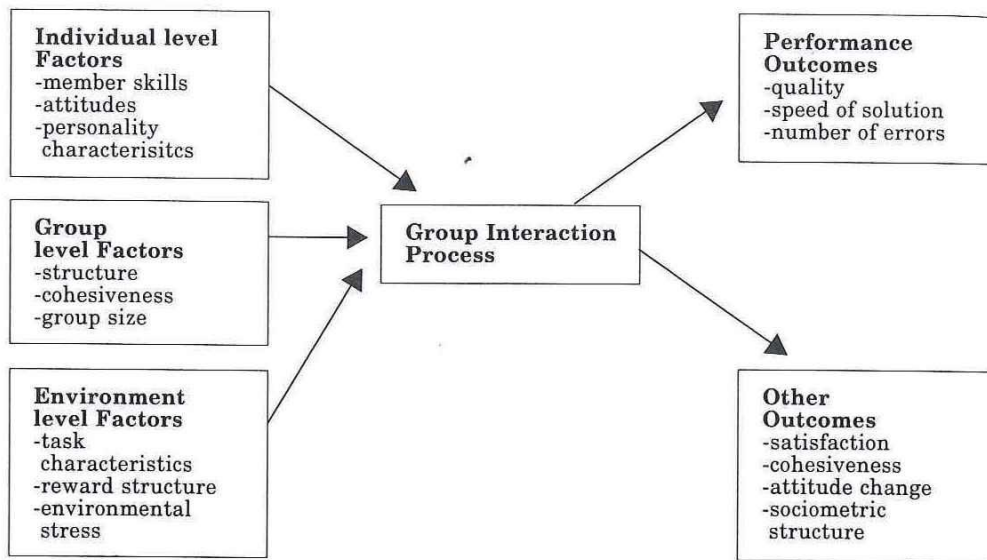
Carew and Carew(1990) saw the necessity for corporations to rely on teams for growth. They argued that during the era of artisans, the society was marked by slavery, servitude and religion. Skilled artisans were needed but there were no teams. Then came the Industrial Revolution which brought in mass production in concentrated workplaces. There were managers, the assembly lines and armies of faceless workers. In today's Information Age, skills have become complex, workers work in a web of interdependence. They depend on teams. The whole organization is a web of cross-functional teams. Corporations must resort to strategies such as increased job flexibility, training and teamwork as the logical response to the changing world.

McGregor (1960) summarized a list of characteristics of effective teams. Likert (1961) also made a list of 24 characteristics for an effective team. Many researchers have contributed to the theories of teams. For example, Argyris (1964) advocated that organizational effectiveness is a function of the competence of teams. Blake and Mouton (1964) developed the Managerial Grid model of team excellence. Tuckman (1965) promulgated a model of team development made up of four stages: (1) forming, (2) storming, (3) norming, and (4) performing. Hackman and Oldham (1980) wrote about quality circles.

Recent developments of team studies have moved towards the formulation of High Performance Teams (Carew and Carew, 1990), Empowered Teams (Byham, 1989), and Self-Directed Teams (Osburn, *et al*, 1990). This trend has been prompted by the fact that the American industries are facing tremendous competition from foreign countries, especially Japan and the Newly Industrialized Countries (NICs). Many corporations, including Motorola, are publicly committed to using more participative approaches in the management of people and production.

## THE RESEARCH SETTING

The research setting was the Motorola manufacturing plant in Seremban, Malaysia, with 3,800 employees. There were 238



voluntary teams similar to quality circles working on a myriad of tasks and problems.

The objective of the research is to learn more about what makes teams effective, and what leads to the self-directedness of teams.

**METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH**

A questionnaire was designed and distributed to the workforce in 1992. A standardized format was used to capture points from interviews with respondents. The interview questions were focused to capture factors which the respondents thought important but were missed out from the structured questionnaire. For the second part of the research on Empowered Teams, personal interviews were conducted for team leaders, managers and the plant-wide team coordinator.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

(a) McGrath's (1954) Model of Group Performance

The group outcome is influenced by a set of input variables comprising of three levels of factors, namely the individual, group and the environmental level. These input variables are strongly mediated by the group interaction process.

(b) Hackman and Morris's(1975) Model of Group Effectiveness

Hckman and Morris augmented McGrath's model by three summary variables, i.e. 1) member knowledge and skills, 2) task performance strategy, and 3) member effort. Critical task contingencies are the moderating variable between the summary variables and group effectiveness.

