The Impact of Uncertainty and Relationships on a Leader's Decision to Resist the Introduction of Self-Managing Teams

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Although research has indicated that self-managing teams can help organizations improve their performance, middle managers instructed to facilitate the introduction of these teams sometimes resist the change effort. One of the key reasons why these managers resist the introduction of self-managing teams is confusion surrounding the role of the manager after the teams have been empowered. This confusion stems from the fact that the manager has responsibility for a team that is expected, to a large degree, to lead itself. Since resistance by middle managers is one of the main factors resulting in self-managed team failures, it is important to learn more about the reasons why these managers support or resist the team initiative. This paper looks at the impact of uncertainty and intraorganizational relationships on middle managers' decision to support or resist the introduction of self-managing teams. It also suggests ways in which organizations might work with managers to help them develop greater openness and support for this team innovation.

Team empowerment is growing in importance since highly empowered teams have demonstrated the capability of performing better than less empowered teams (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999). Although self-managing teams are widely recognized to be of value to organizations, organizational leaders (particularly middle managers) instructed to facilitate the introduction of these teams sometimes feel threatened and, as a result, resist their creation (Sims & Manz, 1995). Some of the reasons why middle managers tend to resist creating self-managing work teams include uncertainty surrounding job security, anxiety about adopting new roles, mistrust of senior executive intentions, and doubts about the ability of the empowered teams to assume new responsibilities (Vanfleet & Smith, 1993). While a substantial amount of work on empowerment has been done in the management literature (O'Creevy, 1998), relatively little research has focused on resistance by middle managers. Since resistance by managers may result in the failure of efforts to create self-managing teams and lead to poor team performance which, in the long run, can lower firm performance; it is important for researchers and practitioners alike to understand this phenomenon better.

The purpose of this research is to examine two important factors: uncertainty and relationships and how they influence a leader's decision to resist or support the introduction of self-managing teams. The paper focuses on middle managers and looks at the impact of three types of uncertainty (state, effect, and response uncertainty) on a manager's resistance to the introduction of self-managing teams. In addition, the authors examine the effects of the quality of the manager's relationships with both their teams and their senior executives and how these relationships influence a manager's decision regarding whether to resist or support the team effort. Relationship constructs that will be studied include trust (credibility and benevolence), conflict (task and personal), and justice (procedural, interactional, and distributive).

Self-Managed Teams (SMTs)

Considerable attention in the literature has been devoted to the introduction of work teams that are assigned significant responsibilities that previously were part of the role of external managers (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Lawler, Mohrman, & Ledford, 1995; Uhl-Bien & Graen, 1998). Frequently labeled self-managed teams (SMTs), these empowered units of workers become a central part of the overall work system design and are typically provided with increased decision-making control and discretion regarding behavioral choices (Manz & Sims, 1986). Hackman has described SMTs as possessing

> a relatively whole task; members who each possess a variety of skills relevant to the group task; workers' discretion over such decisions as methods of work, task scheduling, and assignment of workers to different tasks; and compensation and feedback about performance for the group as a whole. (Quoted by Cummings, 1978, p. 625)

By empowering employees within a team based structure, SMTs act to decrease employee dependence on traditional designated leaders within a work system (Cummings, 1978, Manz & Sims, 1987, 1993; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Sims & Manz, 1996). Significant research has found that SMTs often result in higher performance (Cohen & Baily, 1997; Cohen & Ledford, 1994; Guzzo & Dickson, 1996; Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Trist, Susman, & Brown, 1977; Wall, Kemp, Jackson, & Clegg, 1986). For example, The Lake Superior Paper Company utilized SMTs to create one of their most successful start-ups in the paper industry's history (Sims & Manz, 1995). The introduction of SMTs at Carlisle Tire and Rubber, a manufacturer of industrial tires, also led to a 47% improvement in throughput of a bottleneck operation (Vanfleet & Smith, 1993). Motivated by results like these, many senior executives champion the introduction of SMTs in their organizations. They sometimes become aggressive in their efforts to push the initiative through, put their reputation on the line, and may even take it personally when anyone resists the introduction of these teams.

Importantly, however, the actions of leaders and the type of leadership influence they apply within the team system, appears to play an important role in determining the degree of success of SMTs (Manz & Sims, 1987). In particular, whether leaders embrace the importance of empowering team members and use an empowering style appears to be especially critical for enabling teams to perform effectively (Kirkman & Rosen, 1999; Manz & Sims, 1987; Sims & Manz, 1994). If, on the other hand, leaders within the system do not recognize the importance of employee empowerment and actively resist the development of the teams while trying to maintain possession of high centralized control for themselves, team empowerment can become little more than an illusion (Manz & Angle, 2003). Team members may be vulnerable to other forms of disempowering influences such as concertive control (Barker, 1993), and the SMTs can

be set up for failure. Perhaps the most critical impediment to early SMT success is middle manager resistance (Manz & Sims, 1995), and the quality of the relationships between middle managers and those involved in the implementation of the team initiative is one of the key factors influencing the success of SMTs.

Relationships

A middle manager's decision to support or reject an organizational initiative usually does not only hinge on things that are happening at the time of the initiative but also on the quality of relationships that have been developed in the past. According to O'Creevy (1998), middle management resistance is usually a symptom of larger problems in the organization. This section examines the impact of the quality of the relationship between a manager and their senior executives on a manager's decision to support or resist the introduction of SMTs. In addition, we examine the impact of the quality of the relationship between a manager and the members of the SMT on the manager's support/resist decision regarding the team initiative. The paper focuses on three variables of relationship quality: trust, conflict, and justice.

Trust

Trust is conceptualized as existing when one party has confidence in another party's reliability and integrity (Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Employees who have a trusting relationship with their leaders tend to work together with them towards achieving a common goal (Straiter, 2005). On the other hand, those in relationships characterized by mistrust usually have misgivings about the intention of the initiators of change leading to misunderstandings between those involved in the change process (Honey, 1988). Credibility and benevolence are two of the main dimensions of trust found in the literature (Ganesan, 1994).

Credibility-based trust is based on the extent to which a party believes that others can be relied on to keep their word and also have the required expertise to perform a job effectively (Ganesan, 1994). Credibility includes two dimensions: competence and honesty-based credibility. Competence-based credibility arises from one party's confidence in the other party's ability, knowledge, and skill related to a specific task (Cook & Wall, 1980). Honesty-based credibility, on the other hand, is the belief that the other party fulfils role obligations, is reliable, stands by its word, and is sincere (J. C. Anderson & Narus, 1990; Dwyer, Schurr, & Oh, 1987).

The level of credibility-based trust between middle managers and their senior executives is important since a manager who has been asked to introduce SMTs will likely consider the amount of credibility that their executives have before deciding whether it is in their interest to support or resist the new team-based initiative. Managers whose higher executives have been dishonest in the past are more inclined to distrust those executives (Yukl, 2006). They will question their executives' credibility and treat with suspicion any promises that those executives might make about the security of the manager's job after empowerment. Also, managers whose executives have failed in the past to effectively implement prior innovations, particularly leadership-based innovations, will question their executives' competence and ability to successfully implement this new team-based innovation (Sims & Manz, 1995). Managers who do not consider their senior executives to be honest and question those executives' competence are likely to resist requests to lead the new team initiative.
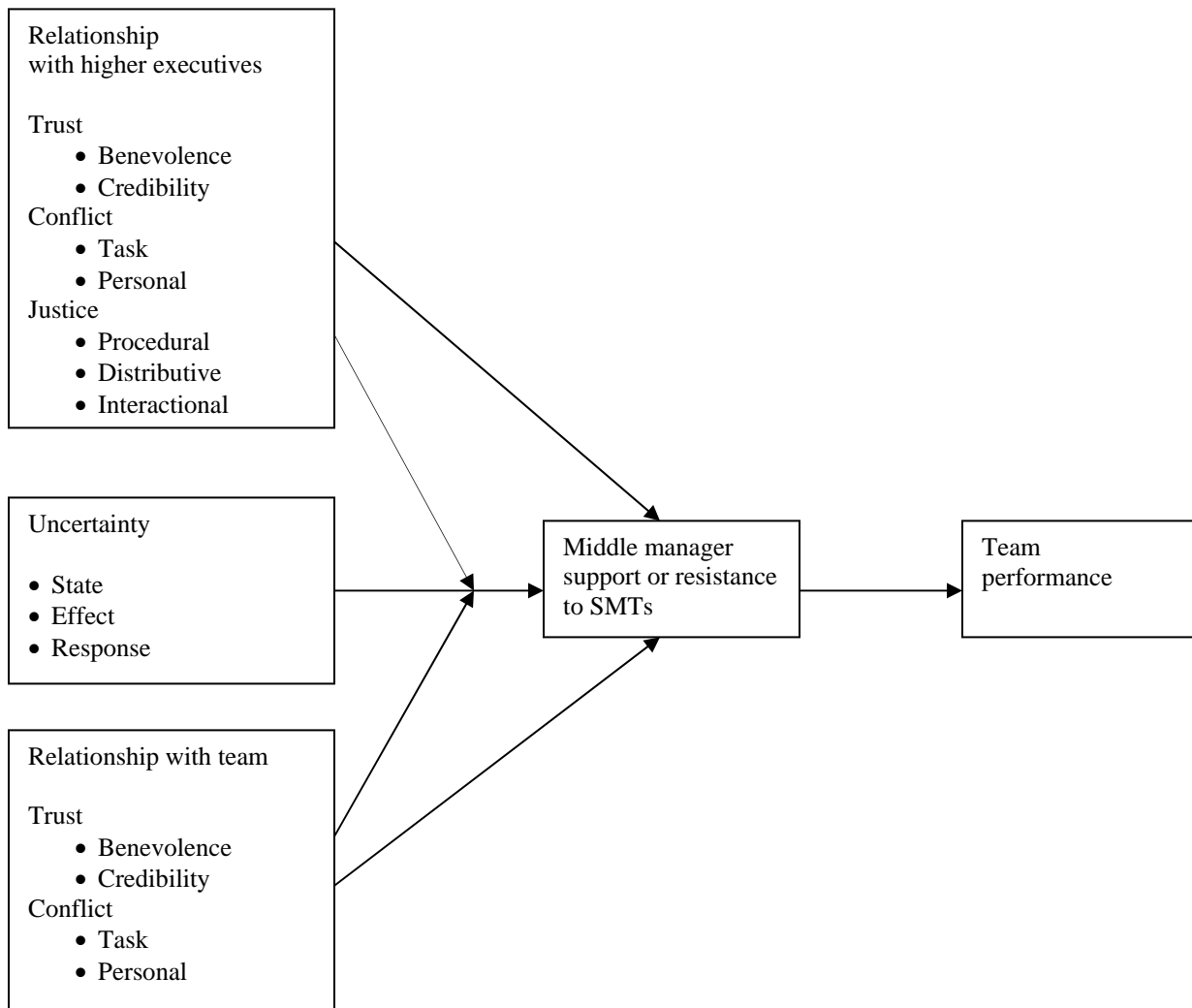
Figure 1. The impact of relationships and uncertainty on a leader's support/resistance to SMTs.

Credibility is also important in the relationship between a manager and the team members. A manager who is experiencing job security uncertainty may try to get assurances from their team members that they are not looking to replace her or him and that they will support the leader as they transition to SMTs. Whether the manager believes these assurances will depend on how credible and honest that he or she believes the team members to be. If he or she believes the team members to be honest, particularly if those members have been honest in the past; he or she is likely going to believe those members and, as a result, support the introduction of teams. If, on the other hand, he or she does not think that those team members are honest, the manager might not believe the assurances from the team members and might decide to resist the team effort.

The middle manager's perception regarding the competence of the team will also affect her decision to support or resist SMTs. Stewart and Manz (1997) found in a qualitative study of

the hotel industry that about half of the middle managers studied had negative attitudes towards empowering their employees. This is because they believed that their employees were not competent enough to accomplish their tasks on their own. In an organization where a middle manager's performance is evaluated based on the performance of the teams that they supervise, the manager will consider the competence of her team before deciding whether to resist or support the team effort (Vanfleet & Smith, 1993). If the manager trusts that the team is competent enough to perform on its own, the manager will be more likely to support efforts to make the team self-managing. This is because the manager knows that if the team is trained to manage itself, its performance will enhance the reputation and performance of the manager. On the other hand, if the manager does not trust that the teams are competent enough, the manager will consider resisting the introduction of these teams for fear that incompetent teams would negatively affect that manager's reputation and performance.

However, note that competence can also potentially work the opposite way. Nonaltruistic managers, who are not supportive of the team empowerment initiative and are looking to derail it, may subtly sabotage the team effort by openly supporting a less competent team for an initial phase-in pilot program. This is because they believe that a less competent team will be unable to effectively self-manage itself and will eventually fail. They hope that the failure of the team will compel the organization to abandon the SMT initiative and, as a result, confirm the place and value of the manager in the organization.

Benevolence-based trust is the belief that one party is genuinely interested in the other party's welfare and, as a result, subordinates immediate self-interest for the long-term benefit of the group (E. Anderson, Lodish, & Weitz, 1987). Benevolence involves showing sensitivity and consideration to the interests and needs of others in a relationship and refraining from exploiting other parties for the benefit of one's own interests (Atuahene-Gima & Li, 2002).

Managers whose executives have made sacrifices for them in the past and gone out on a limb to defend and protect them tend to see those executives as benevolent. On the other hand, executives who are opportunistic and tend to seek only their own self-interest or tend to emphasize the pursuit of profits at the expense of managers' long-term welfare are usually seen to be less trustworthy. If a manager does not trust that an executive is benevolent, it is likely that the manager will be suspicious about requests from the executive to empower teams. He or she will be concerned that their senior executives might exploit them and that the team initiative will lead to consequences that will not be in his or her interest (Yukl, 2006). Because of fears that senior executives might exploit them, the manager may resist the team initiative.

Benevolence also has an effect on the relationship between middle managers and their teams. If a middle manager believes that the teams are benevolent and have the interest of the manager at heart; he or she is less likely to be suspicious of the team and will, as a result, be more supportive of the team initiative. On the other hand, if the manager does not perceive the team members to be benevolent, she or he will be more likely to resist the introduction of SMTs.

Organizational Conflict

Conflict is unavoidable in organizations due to the interdependence and complexity of organizational life (Jehn, 1995). Using Jehn's classification of conflict into task and relationship conflict, we examine the effect of organizational conflict on a manager's viewpoint or attitude towards the introduction of SMTs.

Relationship conflict. Relationship conflict refers to an awareness of interpersonal incompatibilities and involves personal issues such as feelings of annoyance, frustration, and irritation with other members of a group (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Interpersonal tension associated with relationship conflict may lead to negative outcomes such as lower productivity, lower cohesiveness, lack of trust, and poor performance.

Middle managers in environments where there is a lot of relationship conflict with senior executives are likely to be suspicious of efforts by those executives to introduce SMTs. They may consider these team efforts to be a ploy by the executives to make the manager's role in the organization irrelevant in order to get rid of them. Consequently, these managers may come to resist the team empowerment initiative and do whatever they can to ensure that the initiative fails. On the other hand, managers in more supportive environments with less relationship conflict will be more likely to support the introduction of SMTs.

Task conflict. Task conflict refers to disagreements among individuals or group members about their decisions, ideas, and opinions related to a specific task (Medina, Munduate, Dorado, Martínez, & Guerra, 2005). While high levels of task-related conflict can lead to unhappiness, antagonism, and tension among group members (Jehn, 1995), research has shown that moderate levels of task conflict can be beneficial at times since it can lead to more critical evaluations of assignments and increased innovation (Medina et al., 2005). Low levels of task conflict have also been associated with lower levels of performance, leading Jenn to empirically test and find support for a curvilinear relationship between task conflict and performance.

Researchers (Gladstein, 1984; Van de Ven & Ferry, 1980) have also asserted that the type of task that a group performs has an impact on the relationship between task conflict and performance. According to them, the relationship between conflict and performance is different in groups performing routine tasks than in groups performing nonroutine tasks. Jenn (1995) found that in groups performing routine tasks, task conflict was generally detrimental to group functioning. However, in situations where the group performed nonroutine tasks, task conflict was not usually detrimental and, in some cases, was even beneficial to the group effort.

Along those lines, since the introduction and development of teams is a complex process involving many important decisions, moderate levels of task conflict will be beneficial in the introduction of SMTs in groups that perform nonroutine tasks. High or low levels of task conflict will, however, be detrimental to the introduction of SMTs in nonroutine task environments. Also, task conflict will be detrimental to the team initiative in an environment where the team works on routine or repetitive tasks.

Organizational Justice

Organizational justice refers to the perception of fairness among agents in an organization (Greenberg & Bies, 1992), and the concept is very important when a weaker party is being influenced by a stronger party (Lind & Tyler, 1988). Middle managers frequently see themselves as potential losers when they are asked to introduce SMTs (Sims & Manz, 1995). This perception can result in some managers feeling that requests to empower their teams are unfair. Since an individual who feels like they are being treated unfairly may perform poorly (Brashear, Manolis, & Brooks, 2003) or resist requests to empower their teams, it is important to consider a manager's perception of fairness or justice when trying to encourage him or her to empower their employees. Although there has been extensive research done on organizational justice, the

concept has not been adequately covered in the empowerment literature. This section emphasizes the value of the organizational justice concept in the introduction of SMTs. Three main categories of justice can be found in the literature and include procedural justice (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), distributive justice (Brashear, Brooks, & Boles, 2004), and interactional justice (Bies & Moag, 1986).

Procedural justice. Procedural justice is concerned with the fairness of procedures (Thibaut & Walker, 1975). An important element of procedural justice is the ability of a party to participate or have a voice in a decision (Beugre, 1998). People tend to perceive a procedure to be fair when they are allowed to voice their opinions. A clear indication of procedural justice in an organization is the presence of a mechanism to ensure that workers have a say in things that are happening (Brashear, Manolis, & Brooks, 2003).

Quite often the decision to introduce SMTs is made at the senior executive level, and middle managers are informed after the decision has been made. Since they are often not consulted when the initial decision is made, many of the concerns that middle managers might have about the new team initiatives are usually not addressed. While some companies might give middle managers a voice at the implementation stage, often the executive decision has already been made by the senior executives to introduce the teams. Thus, input that these middle managers are allowed is limited in scope to details regarding how the initiative should be implemented. A program of change imposed from above is likely to create greater resistance than one that is developed with the input and cooperation of both the senior executives and middle managers (Vanfleet & Smith, 1993).

Distributive justice. This refers to the perception of fairness concerning how rewards are distributed in an organization (Beugre, 1998). Three categories of distributive justice have been identified in the literature: equity, equality, and need (Brashear, Brooks, & Boles, 2004). Equity refers to the belief that rewards are distributed in proportion to an individual's contributions (Adams, 1965); equality implies that recipients should receive the same amount regardless of their inputs (Beugre); need implies that the welfare or need of each recipient determines the distribution of rewards (Beugre).

Distributive justice can be very important in the empowerment process since managers who are uncertain about the possible outcome of an empowerment initiative will be inclined to look at past behaviors of senior executives to determine what they think the future will have in store for them. If the managers believe that senior executives have treated them unfairly in the past and that rewards, resources, promotions, and layoffs have been distributed unfairly in the organization; it is more likely that they will conclude that they will be treated unfairly in a team initiative that has the potential to put their job at risk. On the other hand, if managers perceive the past distribution of rewards and resources to be fair, they are more likely to support the new team effort.

Interactional justice. Interactional justice refers to the quality of interpersonal treatment received from a principal (Bies & Moag, 1986). Interactional justice has two components: interpersonal and informational justice (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001). Interpersonal justice reflects the degree to which agents are treated with respect, politeness, and dignity; informational justice focuses on the explanations provided to people about decisions, procedures, and outcomes (Greenberg, 1993).

When examining why middle managers resist the introduction of SMTs, it is important to consider how well those in power interact and communicate with the manager. If managers feel like they have not been well treated by executives in the past or during the team empowerment decision, they will be unhappy with the decision which could lead them to resist it. Also, if senior executives do not properly communicate with middle managers regarding their plans to introduce SMTs, managers are likely to have concerns about the initiative. These concerns may cause middle managers to resist the team initiative.

Uncertainty

The concept of uncertainty has been widely studied in the academic literature, and coping with uncertainty is one of the fundamental problems facing organizations (Gerloff, Muir, & Bodensteiner, 1991; Gibbons & Chung, 1995). According to Milliken (1987), uncertainty refers to an individual's perceived inability to accurately predict something. She identified three distinctive components of uncertainty: state, effect, and response uncertainty. These three dimensions of uncertainty have been widely used in the management literature; and, as a result, we will focus on these dimensions.

State Uncertainty

State uncertainty refers to uncertainty about the state of the environment. The concept is synonymous with environmental uncertainty (Gerloff et al., 1991). According to Milliken (1987), administrators experience state uncertainty when they perceive the organizational environment to be unpredictable. This unpredictability can be caused by external factors like an organization's suppliers, customers, competitors, and macro elements such as the economy and global political events. Internal factors like organizational personnel, organizational goals, and intra-unit conflict can also lead to environmental uncertainty (Duncan, 1972).

During periods of high state uncertainty; for example, during a poor global economy or periods of massive layoffs; managers will be more insecure about their place in their organization or their ability to secure a new job if they were to lose their current ones. Since managers who perceive that they could suffer personal financial losses or could lose their job security are more likely to resist change (Yukl, 2006), managers in an environment where there is high state uncertainty are more likely to resist the introduction of SMTs than those in environments where there is a lower level of state uncertainty.

Effect Uncertainty

Effect uncertainty refers to an individual's ability to predict the impact of a change on that individual or their organization (Gibbons & Chung, 1995; Milliken, 1987). During this state of uncertainty, the manager tries to assess the meaning and effect of a change on them and their organization (Gerloff et al., 1991). A key question that a manager seeks to answer during periods of effect uncertainty is: how does this change affect me?

One of the main reasons why organizational leaders resist the introduction of SMTs is uncertainty surrounding the role of middle managers after the teams have been empowered (Manz & Sims, 1987; Sims & Manz, 1994, 1995; Vanfleet & Smith, 1993). This confusion stems from the fact that these leaders have responsibility for a team that is designed to manage itself

(Manz & Sims, 1987). The question arises: if a team can manage itself, why do they need another leader? Also, one may ask: what will happen to the leader once the teams learn how to lead themselves? In fact, there is some reality supporting this fear since one of the typical sources of savings from a SMT system is a delayering of middle managers (Sims & Manz, 1995). After the introduction of SMTs, the number of middle managers is typically reduced, and a lot of those who remain are reassigned to other positions. For example, a Texas Instruments plant in Malaysia reassigned most of its former supervisors to other responsibilities after their SMT initiative (Sims & Manz, 1995). Managers who are uncertain about the effect that SMTs might have on their place in the organization are more likely to resist the team initiative than those who feel more secure about their place in the organization.

Response Uncertainty

Response uncertainty refers to the lack of information regarding available response choices and the inability of an individual to predict the likely consequences of their response choices (Milliken, 1987). Managers who are unsure about the options available and the consequences of their actions are likely to be high in response uncertainty (Gerloff et al., 1991). Some of the questions that a manager might ask during periods of response uncertainty are: how do I respond to this change? how will my response be perceived by the organization? and, will I be penalized if I openly show that I do not support the new team initiative?

Response uncertainty can be an issue during the introduction of SMTs particularly when managers who have concerns about the consequences of the team initiative are not sure how to respond. Managers in organizations where honest communications between managers and senior executives are not encouraged may have concerns about how the executives would react if they were to respond negatively to the introduction of SMTs (Vanfleet & Smith, 1993). Because of these concerns, middle managers will likely express their resistance subtly. Managers who are subtly resisting an initiative may show support while senior executives are around but may do other things in the background to sabotage the initiative (O'Creevy, 1998). Others may undermine the process by withholding information, pouncing on any minor error they see as a sign that the teams are failing, and maneuvering behind the scenes to ensure that the teams fail (Vanfleet & Smith). Middle managers who find themselves in situations where there is high response uncertainty are likely to subtly resist the introduction of SMTs.

Relationships and Uncertainty

Although the quality of intraorganizational relationships is important during the introduction of SMTs, it becomes even more important when the team initiative is introduced during periods of uncertainty. This uncertainty could be caused by macro level issues like a poor economy, organizational events like massive layoffs and poor firm performance, and team level issues like concerns about team performance. During these periods of high uncertainty, middle managers asked to facilitate the introduction of SMTs will be more insecure about their place and future in the organization. These leaders will have to rely a lot more on assurances from other people in the organization, and their level of concern and uncertainty will be influenced by the quality of relationships that they have with those people.

If middle managers have strong and positive relationships with their senior executives and other people involved in the team initiative, they will tend to feel more secure about their

fate even during times of high uncertainty. If senior executives whom they trust tell them that there will be no layoffs as a result of the introduction of the teams, the managers will be more likely to believe those assurances and support the team effort. On the other hand, if they have negative relationships with their executives (e.g., if executives have acted in the past in ways counter to the middle managers' best interests), they will be more likely to be suspicious of the intentions of the other participants in the team initiative. Middle managers will consequently be more likely to treat any assurances with suspicion and will be even more active in their efforts to resist the introduction of SMTs. The quality of intraorganizational relationships, therefore, has both a direct and indirect impact on managers' attitudes towards the introduction of SMTs.

Overcoming Managerial Resistance

According to O'Creevy (1998), the most consistently identified barrier to the success of empowerment initiatives is resistance by middle managers. To minimize managerial resistance to SMTs, effective transitions to empowerment should include efforts to constructively influence the perceptions and behavior of the managers (Stewart & Manz, 1997). For example, Lewin's classic three-step model of change from 1958 suggests three procedures that can be applied in efforts to ameliorate the deleterious effects of managerial resistance to SMTs: (a) unfreezing behavior, (b) changing behavior by teaching new actions and beliefs, and (c) refreezing organizational systems to ensure that the new behavior continues (as cited in Stewart & Manz). Building upon this model, we suggest that executive leaders might facilitate a change toward constructive middle manager behavior by fostering supportive attitudes or viewpoints toward the introduction of SMTs.

According to the theory of reasoned action, an individual's attitudes are a strong predictor of their behavioral intention and actual behavior (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). Efforts to change the behavior of confused and resistant middle managers can begin with initiatives to address their concerns and to help them develop a supportive attitude towards the team initiative. Facilitation of supportive attitudes toward the initiative should promote a reduction in resistance and an increase in constructive behavior conducive to the success of the SMT.

In addition, rather than only viewing resistance as a problem that needs to be eliminated, senior executives and change agents might more constructively view it as a natural part of the change process and as an indicator of a need for better communication and more leadership development activity. Middle managers who seem reluctant to embrace the changes may be genuinely anxious and concerned about the uncertainties around the introduction of the new team initiative. Frank discussions of the manager's concerns need to be encouraged and open communications maintained (Vanfleet & Smith, 1993).

Stewart and Manz (1997) found empirical evidence that empowerment efforts are more likely to succeed when managers are helped to overcome negative attitudes towards the initiative. According to Vanfleet and Smith (1993), middle managers of Carlisle Tire and Rubber were able to reduce their anxiety and embrace SMTs once they had a clearer idea of what the changes might mean for them. Proper procedures should be developed and communications channels created for all those involved to express any thoughts and concerns that they might have about the initiative. There needs to be transparent planning and clear communication between senior executives and middle managers regarding possible changes to managers' roles and what the organization would do to help managers cope with these changes (O'Creevy, 1998).

    Training should not only be about executives telling their subordinates what to do and how to do it; it should create an open environment where issues and concerns can be properly discussed. Refreezing (the third step of Lewin's model) can occur only after constructive attitudes have been developed and those involved are motivated to work towards the success of these team initiatives.

    It is important to incorporate, in any effort to introduce SMTs, initiatives to ease concerns and anxieties that middle managers might have about their place in the organization during and after team empowerment. Executives should also be aware that whether the managers believe their assurances will be based on the type of relationship that they have built with them in the past. Senior executives need to learn that it is important to build long-term quality relationships with their middle managers and other employees. Building a strong relationship with employees is usually one of the best investments that a leader can make, particularly in this era when employees face a lot of uncertainty. Indeed, the success of important organizational initiatives could very likely hinge not on things that are happening at the time that the initiative is being implemented; but rather on actions, perceptions, and attitudes that have been developed in the past.

    Although middle managers can be negatively affected by the introduction of SMTs, there is evidence to show that there is very often an important role for them to play after SMTs have been introduced. Manz and Sims (1987) found support for the importance of mid-level external leaders of SMTs in addition to the new forms of leadership that emerge within the teams. Typically, this is more of a facilitating role that aims at helping the teams learn how to lead themselves. The type of leader that carries out this kind of role has been referred to as a SuperLeader (Sims & Manz, 1994). Part of middle managers' development efforts can be the provision of information about this new kind of role. Managers can also be reassured that, even after the introduction of SMTs, they will still have an important leadership role to play in the organization.

Conclusion and Future Research

    The intention of this paper was to examine two important factors, uncertainty and relationships, and how they influence middle managers' views and potential resistance towards the introduction of SMTs. Specifically, we examined the impact of trust, justice, and conflict on managers' decision regarding whether to support or resist the new team initiative. We also examined the impact of state, effect, and response uncertainty on managers' decision.

    We posited that middle managers deserve special attention when introducing SMTs because they have the power and capacity to enhance or seriously interfere with the progress of the initiative and even cause the teams to fail. Therefore, organizations would be well advised to pay particular attention to the concerns that these leaders might have about the initiative and attempt to address these concerns. Efforts to introduce some sense of environmental stability and otherwise help managers deal with the additional levels of uncertainty that they have to face as a result of the new team initiative can be helpful. Preferably, middle managers need to be involved in the making of decisions regarding the introduction of the team initiative, and the consequences of the introduction of these teams should be made clear to them. Senior executives also need to foster strong relationships with their employees because the strength of these relationships could significantly impact the success of the team initiative and future innovations that the organization might decide to introduce.

This work is an initial attempt to examine some of the key reasons why middle managers resist the introduction of SMTs. Future research can be conducted to explore empirically and in more depth the reasons why managers resist the introduction of SMTs. Qualitative research including detailed interviews and direct observation could be especially helpful for uncovering the rich nuances that contribute to managerial resistance and developing more generalizable models and theories.

SMT research could also be conducted across international boundaries to determine if different cultures respond to the phenomenon differently. Some questions that could be examined include: are some cultures more receptive to SMTs than others? are middle managers more likely to be resistant to SMTs in some cultures than others and, if so, why? and, do collective cultures have a better chance of successfully developing SMTs than individualistic cultures, and are middle managers more prone to support them in such cultures? These and several other questions need to be answered in this relatively new and exciting area of research.

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