Developing Successful Teams

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"Bunker by bunker, the eight Marine battalions converged, assisted by tank reinforcements and 10th Marines pack howitzers. By the afternoon of the second day, Shoup reassured [General] Smith that the battle had turned: 'Casualties many; percentage dead not known; combat efficiency: We are winning.'"[1] To achieve maximum results within the single battle concept, Marine air-ground task force (MAGTF) commanders must understand how to develop successful teams. Most organizations today including the Marine Corps realize the benefits of forming a group to achieve certain goals.[2] The combined effects of a group in the Marine Corps can have significant impact on missions.

What many leaders fail to grasp is that even though a group has significant potential and the ability to perform certain functions and in some cases even be successful, it is not a team. In order for a group to become a team, it must go through a development process.[3] During this process the group will go through several stages.

Prior to developing into a team, groups will go through a series of growing stages, which are forming, norming, and growing and accepting.[4] During each stage the group will experience conflict, and provided the group can develop beyond the conflict, it can become a team. Not all groups become teams; however, if during the growing process the group receives the right training and leadership, it can form into a successful

team. Consequently successful teams help a MAGTF commander

achieve maximum results from the single battle concept.

Forming

Forming is the first stage a group goes through, and it has

two different and distinct aspects: The first aspect is the

group experiences a sense of euphoria from being newly formed.

The second aspect of the forming stage occurs when group members

experience a sense of reservation stemming from the need to

protect their feelings/pride. Both aspects can seem awkward and

confusing to the members.

An example of how this applies to the Marine Corps and can

directly affect the single battle concept is the joining of a

new member to a unit or staff, and the forming of new units,

especially the standing up of a coalition or joint staff.

Individual members are usually elated at the beginning when

joining a new unit. Elation can quickly be halted if the member

thinks their opinion does not matter. Commanders can help

alleviate this problem by considering all members opinions

equally, and ensuring his/her staff does the same. This allows

members to feel they are a contributing part of the unit.

Where this ties in to the single battle concept is when

members feel their contributions are not wanted nor needed they

can develop hidden agendas and become internally focused. This

neither helps the team nor accomplishes the mission, and in the

Marine Corps there is no place for hidden agendas, since our mission is accomplished by Marines who are prepared to give their lives for success in many cases. Commanders are very crucial to the success of the group in this early stage as they set the tone. By providing an atmosphere where all members contribute to the single battle they set the stage for a group that can be developed into a successful team.

Consequently, leaders must understand how to develop people from different backgrounds. The ideals that define success and help members interpret what is important vary depending on the individual. Sometimes leaders fail to take a member's personal ideals into account. The result is that the finished product may not meet the leader's definition of success. Each leader must realize that team members may define success differently based on individual ideals, and he/she must ensure that all members of the team clearly understand the desired result.

Similarly individuals form opinions from feelings of what is right or wrong, moral values, frames of reference, beliefs, culture, and ideals. Although group members may be willing to relent on some of these issues, they may not be so willing to relent on others. Therefore a working environment must be fostered in which all members feel free to state and discuss their opinions with all members, especially members whose opinions differ.[5]

Allowing members to speak freely about their ideals and how they relate to the accomplishment of the mission can go far in providing decision making information to commanders, especially on today's battlefield where the human terrain is becoming more and more important. By creating an environment within the group that fosters these different points of view, the battle staff can use the same concepts to focus outward, and work within an environment where the entire human terrain may have a different point of view.

Equally differing views will create friction within the group. Creating an environment where staff members can come to consensus to achieve the required end state of the single battle with differing views is vital for a group to become a team. In order to get the best decision making information possible from his/her battle staff, the commander must create an environment where the staff can agree to disagree.

Conceivably today's Marine Corps is very diverse and Marines come from many different cultural backgrounds. Leaders must use this diversity as a force multiplier, because diversity brings many different points of view to an individual problem.[6]

Successful teams require leaders who can develop the group into a team. To do this a leader must communicate the purpose of the team and have a vision for them to achieve. Additionally the team's role and structure must be clearly understood by all.[7]

During forming, things can seem to be going well, but internally members may feel a sense of insecurity. Results and interpersonal relationships will begin to become strained as the members are still concerned with self-preservation. The forming step will always end in conflict. The key to success in forming is managing the conflict in a way that allows the group to form. Once the group has formed it will be one step closer to becoming a team and one step closer to helping the commander achieve maximum results from the single battle concept.

Norming

During the norming stage conflict will continue to flourish as members try to understand their roles within the team and the role of the team within the organization. Therefore leaders must establish team norms and set performance guidelines.[8] Additionally, leaders must develop a feedback mechanism, ensure the team knows what that mechanism is, how it works, and ensure it provides for continuous improvement.

The key to success in the norming stage is simply developing trust. No Marine has all the right answers, but when a group or staff reaches the point of trust and can agree to disagree, they have enhanced their ability to become a team and achieve results within the single battle concept.

For example, when staff members can go to other staff members, whom they know have different opinions about the

process, and ask questions with the knowledge, that although opinions may be different, the answer will be honest. The ability to create a better plan and provide better information for the commander to make a decision will exponentially increase. This trust in itself is one of the largest contributors to groups and teams being able to achieve maximum results within the single battle concept.

During norming, barriers to progress will start to be broken down and group members will begin losing their feelings of insecurity; however, group members must understand how to operate within conflict. They must also realize that conflict will be a normal part of the everyday routine. The biggest key to success during norming is ensuring members learn to trust each other even though their opinions, ideals, and solutions may differ.[9]

Growing and Accepting

The growing and accepting stage begins when each group member realizes that he/she can operate within the conflict.[10] Additionally, each member of the group has accepted his/her role, the role of the group, and begins to work toward ensuring his/her efforts contribute toward the success of the group. Group members begin to hold themselves accountable for their actions and deliverables and seek knowledge of how to best contribute to the group and the overall mission. This stage

sounds easy for the leader, but it is not.[11] All group members will not develop at the same time or speed. Some members will grow and accept naturally, whereas others may need more guidance and leadership.

   At this stage groups are well on their way to becoming teams and this is where the commander will start seeing increased performance and results towards achieving the single battle concept. During this stage is where the group becomes more important than the individual and members will start approaching other members and making statements such as, "I know we don't agree on this, but if you need my help it is available." and "I know we often times agree, but I think your wrong on this one." Staff meetings and planning evolutions become shorter, and results come faster and are better, because members state their opinion and then work towards consensus for the good of the group and to achieve the desired end state. Conclusively when a group or battle staff reaches this level of cross it can achieve maximum results from the single battle concept and the only way to get to this point is to understand how to lead a group through the growing process.

   Additionally, growing and accepting may last a long time, and many groups never make it out of this stage, especially if the group is formed for a short project or experiences high turnover. If the group completes the growing and accepting step

it will actually be a team that can solve internal problems and begin to think and operate as a collective unit.

Counter Arguments

Opponents would argue that tactical efficiency is more important than team development, because Marines will operate as a team if they understand the tactics and can shoot, move, and communicate. Although the author agrees that all Marines must be able to shoot, move, and communicate if a unit is to be successful, unit proficiency comes from well-developed teams who understand tactics and can shoot, move, and communicate. The author would also argue that four good platoons do not make a good company, but the leader who can take those four good platoons and turn them into a team with a single purpose will have a great company.

Other opponents would argue that because of the way Marines go through initial training they are already teams and just need regular supervision. This opponent is the fire fighter. He/She usually has good groups of Marines that are not developed to their fullest potential. This leader wants to be there to help the Marines solve every problem and to put out every fire. A leader cannot be everywhere on the battlefield; therefore the Corps must train and develop Marines and teams that can execute mission type orders. Accordingly subordinate units must be able to operate from a clear mission statement and commander's

intent, something that only teams do well. When the shooting starts, the ability to supervise is greatly diminished, but the ability to lead is still there creating the perfect environment for well developed teams and their leaders to operate.

Conclusion

Some people teach that good leaders always surround themselves with good people. However, if one looks deeper he/she will find that good leaders know how to develop successful teams,[12] especially in the Marine Corps. In the Marine air-ground task force a commander who understands the development process a group goes through (forming, norming, growing and accepting), and who provides the leadership to develop the group during that process will always achieve maximum results within the single battle concept.

1957 Words

Notes

1. United States Marine Corps, FMFM 1-0: Leading Marines (Headquarters United States Marine Corps, 1995) 47

2. Susan A. Wheelan, *Creating Effective Teams: A Guide for Members and Leaders* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 1999): 1-2.

3. Wheelan, Creating Effective Teams, 3.

4. The terms used to describe the steps a group goes through when developing into a team are not aligned as stated in any single reference that I researched, but are a conglomeration that I put together and came in part or whole from almost every single reference cited in the bibliography. Most of these terms were specifically cited and defined in the text book references.

5. Wheelan, Creating Effective Teams, 60.

6. Wheelan, Creating Effective Teams, 61.

7. Wheelan, Creating Effective Teams, 8.

8. Wheelan, Creating Effective Teams, 10.

9. Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002): 202-203

10. Al Kaltman, *Cigars Whiskey and Winning: Leadership Lessons Learned from General Ulysses S. Grant* (Paramus, NJ: Prentice Hall Press, 1998): 93

11. Lencioni, Five Dysfunctions of a Team, 190

12. Wheelan, Creating Effective Teams, 73-75

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