THE CORRELATION BETWEEN TEAM COHESION AND TEAM PERFORMANCE IN TOURISM-BASED ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

This research focuses on the relationship between team cohesion and team performance in the tourism field. The literature review showed that researchers have found different results on the relationship between these two variables. The present case study was based on the hypothesis that, in the organizations that offer support to their employees, the teams with strong cohesion obtain better results compared with those with poor cohesion. The study was conducted in eight teams that share similar characteristic. The survey method was used for gathering data with two structured questionnaires: one questionnaire used for measuring the performance of the eight teams and another questionnaire used for measuring the team cohesion. The 5 point Likert scale was used to analyze both team performance and team cohesion. As a conclusion, the study revealed that the hypothesis is true, and the strong cohesive teams obtained higher scores in terms of performance, but the relationship between the two variables is more complex and should be studied in detail in future studies.

Keywords
team, team cohesion, team performance, team outcomes, team communication

JEL Classification
J24, M14

Introduction

Nowadays, the most efficient way of working is in teams, and many service-based organizations are interested in forming and working with teams. For a team to be succesful it has to reach some criteria such as: task completion, goal achievement, empowerement, information sharing, and last but not least, the team's ability to create and sustain a good working environment (Bourgault and Drouin, 2008). Also, an element that influences the efficiency of a team is played by the relationship between team members, which will be studied in this article.

This research will focus on the relationship between two variables: team cohesion and team performance. First of all, one of the most important researches on the topic will be analyzed. Some scientists stated that cohesive teams share more knowledge with each other (Van Woerkom and Sanders, 2010), while others think that people who trust each other better achieve their goals (Deutsch,1949). Other specialists, on the contrary, think that team cohesion affects in a negative way the team efficiency (Dailey,1991; Pinto, 2007). There is also a third category, who have found a reciprocal relationship between team cohesion and performance (Greene, 1989; Landers et al., 1982; Williams and Hacker, 1982).

Due to the large number of studies, only a few focused on the link between team cohesion and team performance in the tourism field. This article could be taken into consideration as a future base to study the relationship between the two concepts. The study was conducted in eight teams that activate in the tourism sector. The hypothesis of this research was that the independent variable - team cohesion - influences in a positive way the dependent variable - team performance. In other words, the teams that register the highest scores in terms of cohesion, obtain the best results, in terms of outcome.

The eight teams shared similarities in terms of: number of team members, the percentage of female and males, the main activities and processes, the studies.

In the last part of this research paper, the results and conclusions will be presented and future directions for new researches will be pointed out.

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1 Literature review

It has been demonstrated, that people who trust each other and rely one another, obtain better results(Beal et al., 2003; Chioccio and Essieembre, 2008; Webber and Donahue, 2001). Team cohesion was defined as the total set of forces that keep the group members together (Andrews et al., 2008). Cohesion in a team refers to the affinity between group members and their identification as a group (Organ et al., 2006). Cohesion can be perceived as the degree of attractiveness manifested by a group upon its members. Team cohesion depends on making the existence of the team matters to the individual (Fine and Holyfield, 1996). In other words, participating in activities together, is an important step that helps the employees gather common memories and identifying themselves with the group. To sum up, the team cohesion is the feeling of each member that he/she belongs to the group and their dedication to follow the common goals of the group. The group objectives tend to be more important than the individual objectives.

The main purpose of organizing the work in teams is to obtain better results, by using the efforts of many individuals to follow a common goal. A particular interest was paid to the concept of team performance, and this could be observe through the special attention given by numerous researchers. A team is perceived as being effective when its members are considered to possess many skills and abilities (Karakowsky et al., 2004). People tend to identify more with a succesfull team, compared with a team that has not been clasified as being effective. From the manager's point of view, the effectiveness of a team is translated in terms of: task completion, goal achievement, empowerement, information sharing, and last but not least, the team's ability to create and sustain a good working environment (Bourgault and Drouin, 2008). Each employee of the work group is responsible of the relationships she/he develops with other coworkers. Regarding the sharing of information, the way in which it is transmited inside the team, has a direct impact on the final results of a team. If the team members trust each other and think they can rely one another, the information is transmitted fast and without any difficulties. From literature review, team effectiveness is influenced by independent variables like leadership roles (Duygulu and Ciraklar, 2008), team members's attitude, team effectiveness perception and team environment (Finnegan, 2002), formalization, autonomy, and quality of decision making process (Bourgault and Drouin, 2008), group emotional intelligence (Aslan and Ozata, 2008). As one can notice, the team effectiveness is influenced by a multitude of factors.

The dynamic relationship between team cohesion and team performance has represented a theme of debate for quite a while. Many researchers focused their attention on studying this relation and one of the most important results are mentioned below.

There are some researchers that suggested between the two variables there is a positive relation. The study conducted by Marianne van Woerkom and Karin Sanders in 2010, concluded that team members in cohesive teams disagree just as much with each other as team members in non-cohesive teams. Nevertheless, the team members in cohesive teams share more knowledge with each other, probably because they feel more motivated to achieve the team's goals (van Woerkom and Sanders, 2010). The fact that in cohesive teams people share more knowledge and help each other is a key factor that helps the teams to achieve their objectives faster. When people communicate and create bounds one with another inside the team, the results will be achieved in a way in which the resources are more efficiently used. Some studies proved that goals are more likely to be achieved when individuals of a team trust each other and are able to stay together, than in the situation when they feel they can't rely one another (Deutsch, 1949).

Not all the specialist think the influence of team cohesion plays a positive role on team performance. For example, some specialists, think that team cohesion affects in a negative way the team efficiency (Dailey,1991; Pinto, 2007). There are studies that suggest one of the drawbacks of team cohesion is the spread of group thinking. When team members are too cohesive, they will voluntarily conform to established norms or behaviours that negatively impact team performances (Dailey, 1991). In other words, one of the dangers a cohesive team faces with, is the danger of losing some valuables ideas. The individuals will tend to agree with their colleagues and they will loose interest in finding some new solutions and ideas, that could have been more efficient in providing better results. Pinto (2007) pointed out the danger of having inside a cohesive team a dysfunctional behaviour. In non-cohesive teams, this type of behaviour is detected in early stages and it is less probable to influence team performance. But in cohesive teams, because people tend not to question someone's idea, the dysfunctional behaviours could take roots inside the team and cause severe damages.

Team identification is positively related to performance, or, in other words, team performances are higher when people identify themselves more with the work group (Solansky, 2011). It was found a reciprocal relation between team cohesion and performance (Greene, 1989; Landers et al, 1982; Williams and Hacker, 1982).

Other researchers, pointed out that there is no connection between group cohesion and team performances. The results of a hockey team that obtained poor results during winter season, although the group was strong cohesive, should be a conclusive example (Taylor, Doria and Tayler, 1983).

Taking into consideration the previous studies of the relationship between team cohesion and team performance, one can say that between the two variables there is a complex relation, and further studies should be conducted in order to establish the nature and influence between the two constructs. Next, a case study was conducted on eight teams that activate in the tourism industry, in order to establish the type of influence that exists between the two concepts.

2 Methodology

In order to perform the research, the survey method was used and the instruments used for collecting the data were two structured questionnaires: 1 questionnaire used for measuring the performance and another questionnaire used for measuring the cohesion of each team. The performance questionnaire included four questions with five types of answer choice. The questionnaire used for measuring the team cohesion had eight questions with five answer choices each. For the interpretation, the 5 points Likert scale was used for both team performance and team cohesion.

The hypothesis of this study was: the independent variable - team cohesion - influence in a positive way the dependent variable - team performance. In other words, the teams that register the highest scores in terms of cohesion, obtain the best performances.

For this study, eight teams were selected, teams that operate in the tourism industry. The main responsabilities of the employees from these teams consist in offering support via email to their tourists. The eight teams shared similar characteristics in terms of work processes and work tasks, team size , age, studies. The teams have 8, 13, 10, 8, 6, 9, 10, 8 members, and 80% of the respondents were females. Regarding the studies, 85% of the employees from the 8 teams graduated master classes in tourism, and, the rest of 15% had bachelor degrees and highschool diplomas. The females had ages between 20 and 45 years old and the males had between 25 and 33 years old.

The questions used for measuring the performance were: What is the average time for solving a client's demand per employee/month?, How many emails have been solved by the employee/month?, On average, how many demands have remained unsolved by the employee per month?, In what proportion did the employee achieved the monthly target?. The answer choices were: for the question: What is the average time for solving a client's demand per employee/month?, the answer choices were: <= 1 minute (5 points), 2-3 minutes (4 points), 3-5 minutes (3 points), 6-8 minutes (2 points), >8 minutes (1 point); for the question: How many emails have been solved by the employee/month?, the choices were: <1500 emails (1 point), 1500-2400 email (2 points), 2500-3400 emails (3 points), 3500-4400 emails (4 points), >4400 emails (5 points). The answering choices for the third question were: 0 demands (5 points), between 1 to 3 demans (4 points), between 4-6 demands (3 points), between 7 and 9 demands (2 points), more than 9 demands (1 point). For the question: In what proportion did the employee achieved the monthly target?, the choices of answer were: 90-100 % (5 points), 75-89% (4 points), 50-74% (3 points), 30-49% (2 points), <30% (1 point).

The answer choices were established as a result of the interviews with the managers of the selected teams. The purpose of these interviews was to establish the criteria taken into consideration when a manager evaluates his/her employees. It has been decided, that for the tourism consultancy activities done by email, the average time to solve a client demand is three minutes, and an employee solves on average 3500 emails/month. If an employee achieves per month more than 75% of the established target, it is considered that he/she meets the target. Based on these information, multiple choices of answer were chosen, in order to establish the performances of the eight selected teams. The questionnaire was designed for the managers, because the managers are the ones who evaluate the employees.

The questionnaire used for measuring the team cohesion included eight items and it was designated for the employees. The questions were: "How comfortable do you feel when you express your opinions in front of other people from the team?" (the answering choices were: very comfortable=5 points, comfortable=4 points, in a way comfortable=3 points, rather uncomfortable=2 points, totally uncomfortable=1 point), "Apreciate how often do you see your colleagues after work and do you spend time with them to develop relaxing activities" (very often=5 points, often=4 points, quite often=3 points, rather rarely= 2 points, very rarely=1 point), "Apreciate the degree in which your colleagues help you to finish your work tasks" (very much=5 points, much=4 points, quite much=3points, a bit=2 points, not at all=1 point), "Appreciate your relationship with team mates" (very good=5 points, good=4 points, quite good=3 points, not so good=2 points, bad=1 point). Other questions included: "Do you consider a pleasure to work together with your colleagues to achieve a common goal?, Please apreciate this

on scale from 1 to 5", "Do you have many friends from your work colleagues? ", "Please appreciate how satisfied you are because you are part of the team (on a scale from 1 to 5) ", "If you have the possibility to choose between a group activity and an individual activity inside the team, in what measure will you chose the group activity? ". The answering choices had scores from 1 to 5, 1 corresponding to the lowest level and 5 to the highest level. The questionnaire used for measuring the team cohesion also included identification questions which helped the researcher to make a synthesis about the percentage of males and females, the age of the respondents and their level of studies.

3 Results and discussion

The results of this study are presented below:

Table 1. The scores of team cohesion and team performance

Team	The team cohesion	The performance
Team 1	3.7	3.93
Team 2	3.072	3.42
Team 3	3.67	3.85
Team 4	2.17	3.12
Team 5	3.45	3.54
Team 6	3.25	3.1
Team 7	2.87	2.9
Team 8	3.14	3.28

Source: Table made by the author based on the results from the questionnaires

Based on the results, the indexes of the central tendency were calculated in Excel. The eight teams that participated in this study obtained the average of the team cohesion $x_{team\ cohesion} = 3.165$, which means, the teams are medium cohesive. The average performance is $y_{team\ performance} = 3.39$, which means that the results obtained by the eight teams are medium in terms of performance. Both results of team performance and team cohesion are interpreted on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 corresponds to the lowest level and 5 to the highest level. Another index of the central tendency is represented by the median M_e. Regarding the team cohesion, the $M_{eteam\ cohesion}$ of 3.195 means that 50% teams obtained results under the average value of 3.165, and 50% obtained results above this value. For the team performance, the median value $M_{eteam\ performance}$ of 3.35 indicates the fact that 4 out of 8 teams, obtained results under the average value of 3.39, and 4 teams obtain results above 3.39. The mode value of the independent variable team cohesion is 3.43, and for the dependent variable team performance is 3.27. This means, that for the team cohesion the value that appears the most is 3.43, and for the team performance is 3.27.

The value of 0.352 of the least absolute deviations means that every calculated value of team cohesion deviated from the average with 0.352. The performance of each team deviated from the average with aproximativly 0.292. The statistical dispersion of the team cohesion was 0.213 ($\sigma^2_{team\ cohesion} = 0.213$), that symbolizes the fact that the degree of variability in the analyzed collectivity was 0.213, variability that was caused by different factors. The dispersion of the team performance was 0.116 ($\sigma^2_{team\ performance} = 0.116$) which represented the degree of variance of team performances around the average value of 3.39, due to the factors that influence the colectivity. Because the value of the dispersion is quite small, one can say that the performance of each team was grouped around the average performance. Concerning the dispersion of team cohesion, its value suggested that the cohesion of each team was close around the average team cohesion. Square average deviation has the following values: 0.462 ($\sigma_{team\ cohesion} = 0.462$), 0.341 ($\sigma_{team\ performance} = 0.341$). These indexes measured the degree in which the data were spread around the average.

Regarding the asymmetry, in the case of team cohesion, the asymmetry was negative, because the average < the mode value, and in the case of team performance, the asymmetry was positive, the average>the mode value.

In the case of team cohesion, the coefficient of asymmetry Carl Pearson was $Kas_{team\ cohesion}$ -0.573, which is included in [-1;1]. This means that it was a small asymmetry, and the indexes of the central tendency are quite significant. The same one can tell about the coeficient of asymmetry of team performance, which has a value of 0.351 ($Kas_{team\ performance} = 0.351$).

The coefficient of variation, in the case of team cohesion is 14.59% ($Cv_{team\ cohesion} = 14.59\%$), and in the case of team performances is 10.05% ($Cv_{team\ performance} = 10,05\%$), both values being under 30%, that means the colectivity is homogenous and the average values are representative for the analyzed colectivity.

The t test was used for concluding if the team cohesion influences the team performance. The t test was used because the sample is small. The H_0 hypothesis of this study presumed there was no connection between the two analyzed variables, team cohesion and team performance. The H1 hypothesis: the team cohesion influences in a certain way the team performance. The value of the calculated t test was -0.685 (the value s=0.431- the standard deviation of the analyzed sample). The value of the t test from the table, which corresponds to 7 degrees of liberty (df = n-1) was 2.365. Because $t_{calculated} < t_{table}$, the H_0 hypothesis was rejected and the conclusion was the team performance was influenced in a certain manner of the coehesion inside the team.

The representativeness errors were calculated, for the two analyzed variables: team cohesion and team performances: $\mu_{team\ cohesion} = 0.0374$; $\mu_{team\ performance} = 0.0428$. Both values of the errors of representativity were lower that 0.05%, which signifies the correlation is statistically representative.

The study was conducted in decembre 2016, and it gathers information about the performances and the activity of the employees achieved in November 2016.

Conclusions

Researchers have focused their energy to find out what does it mean an efficient team. The performance of a team is a complex structure which refers to: task completion, goal achievement, empowerement, information sharing, the team's ability to create and sustain a good working environment. Team performance depends on a multitude of variables, but to one particular variable, the specialists have given a certain interest: team cohesion.

Team cohesion represents the relationships between team members, and because of the dynamic of these realationships, it can also be perceived as the total set of qualities that makes the team attractive for the individuals.

The correlation between team cohesion and team performance has been studied by many specialits who have found contradictory results. Some of them think there is no correlation between the two variables, others think the team cohesion influences in a certain way the team performance.

The research conducted on eight tourism teams had the purpose to point out if the team cohesion influences in a way the team performance. In order the study to be representative, a special attention was dedicated to the way in which the teams were selected: to have similar characteristics in terms of tasks and processes, size, percentage of male versus females, level of studies. The results showed the teams which have the highest scores in terms of cohesion, obtain the best results in terms of performance in the tourism organizations. The statistic indexes showed the colectivity was homogenous and the average values were representative for the analyzed colectivity.

This research could be a starting point for future studies that should focus on the main factors that influence the relationship team cohesion-team performance.

The limitations of this case study consisted in the reticence of the managers in answering the questionnaires and in revealing data regarding their employees (the managers were afraid not to create some kind of competitiveness among employees and to cultivate an atmosphere of envy, based on the answers given).

The reasercher had difficulties in convincing the employees to answer the questions addressed to them. Most of the employees were afraid the answers they give would upset their managers or their colleagues.

It was difficult to find teams with more than 3 employees, because the majority of the companies that activate in the tourism sector on Bucharest market are small companies with maximum 3 employees.

Also, for future studies many teams should be taken into account, the study should be extended to a national level and teams from other towns should participate in the study. The time allocated for this kind of researches should also be extended to 6 month/a year/5 years, in order to see the evolution in time of the phenomenon and the researchers to be able to establish a forecast.

This study could represent a starting point for other researchers who are interested in studying the relationship between team cohesion and team performance and the factors that influence this relation.

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