

Effects of Multi-team Leadership on Collaboration and Integration in Subsea Operations (summary poster)

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Introduction

Inspection, maintenance, and repair (IMR) operations in the North Sea are performed from specialized vessels. The article contributes to the understanding of leadership as being too complex to be described as the strategies and behaviors of only one person. These leaders work in concert to be facilitating and contributing to flexibility and adaptation thus initiating collaboration between teams and individuals through interaction processes. This unique leadership model allows for and generates openness, transparency and the practice of basic values like respect and helpfulness.

Results

- Two main problem areas stand out: *unclear lines of communication and responsibilities* and *the impact of strong personalities* mainly negatively affected the collaboration between the top leader functions; captain, offshore manager and client rep (which formally is not a leadership position).
- However, this type of leadership constellation combined with delegation of running operational tasks, also opened possibilities of a freer leadership behavior, labelled informal leadership redundancy. Top positions and positions independent of work schedules (medic i.e.) may offer human support to individuals and teams regardless of organizational position.
- The organizational model generates openness and transparency building a climate which is a prerequisite for constructive sharing of learning within and especially between composite teams. One of the offshore managers illustrated: *The total competence stays within the team* and not within individual positions.
- The leaders within these types of operations particularly exposed three types of behaviors:

- **Creating intergroup relational identity;**

The challenge for leaders in subsea operations is to create or contribute to the creation of an overarching collective identity to facilitate the transformation of the organization from a diversified and more fragmented organization consisting of four or five individual component teams to an executive force of one major team supervised by one leader. Each of the leaders has their identity towards their original component team, but in the execution phase they belong to the overall team and are supposed to build on

the collective identity without rejecting their component identity. This is possible by building and exposing a shared picture of future tasks and comprised organizing ideas on how tasks are realized by building on personal and commonly shared experiences. In practical daily work this involves support, using flexibility, integrating all and giving workable feedback.

- **Sensemaking;**

Conveying the meaning, purpose and understanding of the operations and the external environmental impacts, is critical to the total team performance. One important part of sensemaking for leaders is the turning of their objectives and intentions into followers' own preferences. This will give the crew a sense of ownership to the operations to be performed. The interviewees described this as: "To implant suggestions that felt like their own". Clarification of leader's messages has also proved to be of help in the crews understanding of the task work. There may be only one opportunity for leaders to clarify and assure that the crew understands their message: Namely to proactively ask the simple question of: "What have you really understood?"

- **Organizing;**

Leaders use organizing principles to arrange the units at the work place according to the complexity of the tasks at hand. IMR projects are complex and need a variety of knowledge and skills in order to be performed successfully. This is solved by assigning different tasks to component teams having specialized competence, where each task could only be finalized with a concerted effort from several teams integrated into one action team under one supervising leader.

Conclusion

The article has identified four foundations of leading a multiteam system: Practiced values (respect, trust and tolerance), openness, collaboration and a sense of belonging and mastering. As foundations of leading behavior, this facilitates the coordination of teams into one multiteam system leading to quality in planning and execution. A balance is instituted between creating a structure through a clear task plan, the introduction of everyone to that plan and the development of flexibility by organizing supplemental competence. Three dominating leadership behaviors have been described as:

1. Being able to create in the teammates a feeling of common identity
2. Behavior were leaders display the purpose and the way ahead in a straight forward and simple way and
3. Finally, the behaviors of organizing the component teams to collaborate in a way were their different competences play together as a common force.