Assessing Members' Perceptions of Team Cohesiveness in a Public Service Department

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Abstract

Teams play an integral role in organisational growth and its use has expanded dramatically to meet competitive challenges. However, teams need to be cohesive in order to be successful. This study assesses team cohesiveness, based on seven dimensions, in a team based police service department. A simple random sample of 61 members from different teams was drawn from a District Police Station, which is dependent on highly cohesive teamwork. Data was collected using a self-developed questionnaire, which was statistically assessed, and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results reflect team members' perceptions of their team's cohesiveness and recommendations are made to enhance these dimensions used to determine team cohesiveness.

Problem Statement and Objectives

To what extent are the teams in the public service department cohesive and how can we enhance their teams' cohesiveness?

In order to develop and maintain a high level of efficiency and effectiveness, employees need to work together. This need is even more compelling in the Police Service where employees need to co-ordinate

their roles in teams to effectively combat crime. Based on one department of the Police Service, this study aims:-

- To determine team members' perceptions of how cohesive their teams are based on setting goals and understanding them, extent of participation, communication, idea generation, conflict management, interpersonal relations and managing obstacles.
- To assess the interrelationships amongst the dimensions used to determine team cohesiveness (setting goals and understanding them, extent of participation, communication, idea generation, conflict management, interpersonal relations and managing obstacles) respectively.
- To evaluate the influence of the biographical variables (age, gender, race, level of education, position occupied) on team members' perceptions of the cohesiveness of their teams; and
- To recommend, based on the findings of the empirical analysis, strategies that may be adopted to enhance each of the dimensions used to determine team cohesiveness (setting goals and understanding them, extent of participation, communication, idea generation, conflict management, interpersonal relations and managing obstacles).

Literature Survey

The manner in which groups of people work together towards accomplishing goals is an issue of longstanding interest in organisational and managerial environments. A strong trend in management strategy in recent years has been to reorganise the workforce into teams. Groups and teams are fundamental to human existence. The increasing popularity of team-based organisational structures reflects the belief that teamwork can achieve outcomes that could not be achieved by the same number of individuals working in isolation. A recent study of 60 South African companies by Productivity Development showed that 38 percent had moved towards team-based organisations as compared to around 65 per cent in the US (Hellriegel, Jackson & Slocum, 2001).

Sulon (1997) defines a team as a set of people working together in an orderly, systematic way to form one unit. Kirkman (2000) defines a work team as a group of individuals working independently toward

common goals and whose members are mutually accountable for task accomplishment. According to Kirkman (2000), what winning teams have in common is the ability of each member to make his or her team members better. Furthermore, researchers (Henkin & Wanat, 1994; Guzzo & Dickson, 1996; Cotterrell, 1996) found that team based work arrangements bring about improved organisational performance, especially in measures of efficiency and quality. Teams are useful in performing work that is complicated, complex, inter-related and of a greater volume than one person can handle (Nelson & Quick, 2003). However, the creativity and productivity of a team depends on its cohesiveness.

According to Eys, Hardy, Carron and Beauchamp (2003: 66), cohesion is

> a dynamic process which is reflected in the tendency for a group to stick together and remain united in the pursuit of its instrumental objectives and/or for the satisfaction of member affective needs.

Hence, team cohesiveness is the strength of group members' desires to remain in the group and, their commitment to the group (Gibson, Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1994); it is the 'interpersonal glue' that binds the members of a group together (Nelson & Quick, 2003). Eys *et al.* (2003) found that team cohesiveness is directly related to team performance, collective efficacy and group norms. Likewise, Nelson and Quick (2003) and Spector (2000) found that cohesion enables a team to exercise effective control over its members in relation to its behavioural norms and standards. Employees operate better as individuals if they consider themselves to be part of a well-functioning supportive team to which all are happy to belong. As committed participants in the team, they are more productive, communicative, trusting, motivated and loyal (New Zealand Management, 2001: 11). Team cohesiveness is influenced by group size (Gibson, Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1994; George and Jones, 2000; Robbins, 2000; Luthans, 2002), similarity/diversity of group members (George and Jones, 2000; Luthans, 2002; Bunderson & Sutcliffe, 2002; Hamilton, Nickerson & Owan, 2003; Nelson & Quick,

2003), competition with other groups (George & Jones, 2000; Luthans, 2002; Ammeter & Dukerich, 2002; Nelson & Quick, 2003), success (Gibson, Ivancevich and Donnelly, 1994; George and Jones, 2000; Luthans, 2002; Nelson and Quick, 2003) and exclusiveness of the group (George & Jones, 2000; Nelson & Quick, 2003).

According to the New Zealand Management (2001: 11), the ideal cohesive self-supporting team displays the following features:

- The atmosphere is informal, comfortable and relaxed.
- There is a great deal of discussion in which everyone participates.
- Team members listen to each other attentively and every idea is aired.
- The goals of the team are well understood and accepted by all.
- There is constructive disagreement and the group seeks resolution rather than domination of the dissenter.
- Decisions are reached by consensus.
- Criticism is frequent, frank and comfortable, with all members being free to express their personal feelings.
- When action is agreed upon, clear tasks are assigned and willingly accepted.
- Members share beliefs/values and seek each other's support and recognition.
- The team displays a united front.
- The leader does not dominate, nor does the group unduly defer to him/her.

Whilst team cohesiveness results in goal accomplishment when team and organisational goals are aligned (George & Jones, 2000), highly cohesive teams have very powerful dynamics, both negative and positive, that impact on performance (Luthans, 2002). Too much cohesiveness can be dysfunctional when team members waste time in chatting or when they engage in groupthink (Gibson, Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1994). George and Jones (2000) maintain that a moderate amount of cohesiveness is functional for the team and the organisation when it encourages members to participate and share information.

Numerous strategies are adopted to encourage team cohesiveness. Since an important part of forming a high quality team is shaping its

spirit and heart, Bassin (1996) believes that human resource executives should encourage team cohesiveness by:

- Holding 'reflection' meetings at least quarterly.
- Ensuring that the game plan is short, measurable and public.
- Making developmental feedback a way of life.
- Creating employee policies and programs to support and reinforce team-based performance.
- Educating senior management on the need for role models of team-based behaviour.

Furthermore, the New Zealand Management (2001: 11) recommends that strategies to enhance team cohesiveness include promoting interaction between team members, clarifying and negotiating roles, stressing teamwork and ownership, providing leadership support, facilitating task accomplishment, acknowledging good work and keeping a management memo.

Taking cognisance of the literature, it becomes apparent that numerous dimensions impact on the cohesiveness of teams. This study assesses perceptions of cohesiveness of teams in a Public Service environment in terms of setting goals and understanding them, extent of participation, communication, idea generation, conflict management, interpersonal relations and managing obstacles.

Setting Goals and Understanding them

Successful teams translate their common purpose into specific, measurable and realistic performance goals (Spector, 2000; Robbins, 2000; Nelson & Quick, 2003). These goals should be the handiwork of everyone in the team, must be meaningful to team members (Weiss, 2002) and should be documented. Donahue (1996) maintains that if members have no input into goals, they are just a group and not a team. Furthermore, measurable goals transform groups of people into teams and drive behaviour and performance (Robinson, 1994: 160). Clear goals lead individuals to higher performance. They enhance the sense of meaningfulness of team members and create a strong commitment to the team's mission (Leadership for the Front lines, 2000; Kirkman, 2000). In addition, clear goals energise teams, facilitate clear communication and help team members to remain focussed on getting results (Robbins, 2000). However, team goals must not only be precise but challenging

too. Good teams put the performance of the group before individual goals; otherwise, people may not co-operate and work together if individual goals pit people against each other (Bragg, 2000). For any team to accomplish its goals, it must influence and regulate its members' behaviour. Effective teams channel their members' behaviour in the direction of high performance and the attainment of group and organisational goals (George & Jones, 2000). One of the important features of a cohesive team is that the goals must be well understood (Donahue, 1996; New Zealand Management, 2001: 11). A team's mission may seem obvious, but it is vital that each member understands the team's purpose, vision and goals in the same way (Thoman, 2000).

Goals must not only be clearly stated and prioritised but must also be regularly reviewed (Yeatts & Barnes, 1996; Fleming, 2001). Numerous researchers (Robbins, 2000; Bragg, 2000; Fleming, 2001) stress the importance of feedback and evaluating team progress towards the accomplishment of goals. Measuring and reviewing goals helps the team to maintain focus on what is important and to make decisions that would enhance the team's ability to heighten its performance. Equally important to setting common goals is to establish common rewards for the team as a whole (Bragg, 2000) and to celebrate small successes and milestones (Weiss, 2002; Messmer, 2003).

Extent of Participation

Participation takes place when management and employees are jointly involved in making decisions on matters of mutual interest, where the aim is to produce solutions to the problems which will benefit all concerned (Armstrong, 1992). In this way, participation allows employees to exert influence over their work and the conditions under which they work (Delbridge & Whitfield, 2001). When participating in teams, all team members get involved in decision-making and decisions are made by consensus or by majority vote. This results in team members feeling responsible for, and committed to, the decisions they have made, thereby fostering the principle of collective responsibility (Cebrzynski, 2001: 56). Participation facilitates harmony in the team (Weiss, 2002) and enhances job satisfaction, where workload is perceived more as a challenge than a burden and is invigorating rather than oppressing (Elloy, Terpening & Kohls, 2001; Hamilton, Nickerson & Owan, 2003). In a cohesive team, team members engage in constructive disagreement,

decisions are reached by consensus and the team displays a unified front (New Zealand Management, 2001: 11). Participation brought about by information pooling and problem solving capabilities tend to have a positive effect on the mutual relationships of team members and the effectiveness of joint outcomes (Gruenfeld, Mannix, Williams & Neale, 1996; Sulon, 1997).

Communication

In a team environment, communication is the exchange of information amongst team members with the goal of achieving mutual understanding not just to analyse a common problem or develop new aspects of shared knowledge and ideas, but to think together and bring about a sense of collective sensibility (Fenton, 1995). Therefore, communication in a team must include both the transference and the understanding of meaning (Robbins, 2000). Communication in teams is effective when it is open and honest, involves the exploration of concerns and alternative actions, when all members match their actions with their words and accept responsibility for the communication process (Sulon, 1997). Open communication results in increased confidence and even more interaction within the group such that discussions begin to focus more specifically on problem-solving tasks and on developing alternative strategies to accomplish the tasks (Gibson, Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1994). Kolb, Osland and Rubin (1995) believes that effective interpersonal communication in a team ensures that thoughts, facts and opinions do not go unheard and are not misinterpreted, as they have the potential to reduce the logical soundness of a decision. Robbins (1991) adds that the most critical communication skills are active listening and feedback. Clear communication and knowing how to get answers to questions are essential to helping teams work effectively (Staff Leader, 2002).

Idea Generation

Teams bring together experts with a variety of knowledge and backgrounds to generate ideas for new products and services (Hellriegel, Jackson & Slocum, 2001). Thus, team creativity can be defined as divergent thinking as reflected in the ability to produce novel and useful ideas and is the cornerstone of competitive advantage (Johar, Holbrook & Stern, 2001). Team creativity and innovation may be facilitated by

challenging goals, structured group interaction, autonomy, a supportive environment (Paulus, 2000), the strength of interpersonal ties (Sethi, Smith & Park, 2002) and knowledge, skills, abilities and personal characteristics of team members (Robbins, 2000). Paulus (2000) emphasizes that one of the benefits of teamwork is enhanced creativity and idea generation, especially when the team engages effectively in idea evaluation when ideas or information are exchanged. Various techniques, such as, brainstorming, the Delphi process and nominal group technique may be adopted to increase the team's creative capability in generating ideas (Gibson, Ivancevich & Donnelly, 1994). Thompson and Brajkovich (2003) found that the more heterogeneous a team is, the more likely it is that the team will excel in all measures of creativity.

Conflict Management

Capozzoli (1999) views conflict as a situation of competition in which the parties are aware of the incompatibility of potential future positions and in which each party wishes to occupy a position which is incompatible with the wishes of the other. Team conflict, from a global perspective, is the tension between team members due to real or perceived differences (Dixon, Gassenheimer & Barr, 2002). According to Robbins (2000), conflict can be functional when it supports the goals of the group and improves its performance and dysfunctional when that conflict hinders group performance. Conflict management is an appropriate goal because maintaining conflict at a manageable level is a desirable way to encourage a work team's growth and development (Hellriegel, Jackson & Slocum, 2001) and to keep it viable, self-critical and creative (Robbins, 2000). When a team suppresses this conflict, it takes longer to become cohesive, and the team risks that it may never gel. Without disagreement it is difficult to get commitment and cohesion. Conflict is a sign of a healthy team if it occurs at the right time. It indicates that the team is processing through important and emotionally charged issues instead of avoiding them (Reinertsen, 2000: 62). Productive conflict resolution involves learning how to disagree over issues and situations such that an altered understanding of the situation occurs, coming up with a solution that can benefit the entire team and strengthen the efficacy among team members (Alper, Tjosvold & Law, 2000; Dixon, Gassenheimer and Barr, 2002), thereby enhancing overall performance. Various researchers (Gibson, Ivancevich &

Donnelly, 1994; Brooks, 2001; Harvard Management Communication Letter, 2000; Robbins, 2000) have suggested strategies that may be adopted to effectively manage conflict in teams. What is important about these techniques is being able to differentiate between the circumstances in which particular styles are the most suitable for achieving the most desired outcome, including achieving the team's objectives and bringing about positive intra-team interactions (Dixon, Gassenheimer & Barr, 2002).

Interpersonal Relations

Teamwork demands consideration for the feelings, styles and sensibilities of other team members. Hence, a conscious effort should be made to develop intergroup relations and manage the emotional component within teams to ensure that team members do not feel humiliated, insulted or castigated (Kennedy, 2001). Critical to a team's initial development is mutual acceptance, trust and emotional comfort. Members must believe in the integrity, character and ability of each other as this will result in co-operative team member relations. When individuals value their membership in the team and find it rewarding to work collaboratively with their team members, they may expend greater effort, thereby developing a sense of belonging and commitment. Straw (1995) found that improved problem solving capabilities tend to have a positive effect on the mutual relationships of team members. In addition, diversity plays an important role in interpersonal relations within a team. According to Straw (1995), the aspiration in composing a team is to strike just the right balance between homogeneity and heterogeneity, that is, members should have a variety of talents perspective, yet be similar enough that they can understand and co-ordinate with one another.

Managing Obstacles

Teams are plagued by numerous problems relating to team members' perceptions of trust (Kirkman, 2000), team members' cultural values (Kirkman, 2000), team members' tolerance for change, communication barriers due to language and culture differences (Govindarajan & Gupta, 2001), groupthink (Spector, 2000), social loafing (Luthans, 2002; Nelson and Quick, 2003), unclear mission (Longenecker & Neubert, 2000), failure to communicate as a team, gender differences (Thoman,

2000), lack of recognition (Longenecker & Neubert, 2000), inadequate training and skills development and lack of project management skills and, lack of sufficient senior management support and commitment (Drew & Coulson-Thomas, 1996). Recognising such barriers and enabling factors is but a first step. Executives need to determine which barriers are likely to prove most intractable in their own organisations, what tools are available to help, how effective these are and where best to direct scarce resources and precious time (Drew & Coulson-Thomas, 1996).

Teams are the way to build strong and effective organisations for the future. The synergy chain process will help organisations to build high performing teams (Nelson & Quick, 2003). However, effective teamwork does not occur simply by mandate, nor does it occur overnight but requires a cohesive team, a supportive corporate culture, certain management and interpersonal skills and practice (Wetlaufer, 1994).

Research Methodology

Participants/ Respondents

A sample of 61 team members from different teams was drawn from a police station based on the north coast of Durban using a simple random sampling technique. The sample size was considered to be suitable to obtain some idea of the cohesiveness within the teams at the police service. The adequacy of the sample for the computation of Factor Analysis was further determined using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (0.712) and the Bartlett's Test of Spherecity (251.493; $p = 0.00$), which respectively indicated suitability/adequacy and significance. The results indicate that the normality and homoscedasticity preconditions are satisfied.

Measuring Instrument

Data was collected using a self-developed, closed-ended, precoded questionnaire comprising of two sections. Section 1 incorporated biographical data, using a nominal scale, relating to age, gender, race, level of education and position in company. Section 2 measured the perception of employees of the cohesiveness of their teams based on

seven dimensions using a 1 to 5 point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5):-

- **Setting goals and understanding them** involves assessing the extent to which all team members are involved in setting team goals, the quality of goal setting and whether there is a clear understanding of the goals of the team by everyone.
- **Extent of team member participation** measures the extent to which team members are involved in decision-making, their extent of participation and the degree to which all team members are treated equally.
- **Communication** measures whether team members communicate openly and honestly with each other and the extent to which effective communication prevails within the team.
- **Idea generation** determines whether team members are focused and energetic and are able to build on each other's ideas.
- **Conflict management** assesses how effectively conflict is managed in the team.
- **Interpersonal relations** determine whether good interpersonal relations exist among team members.
- **Managing obstacles** identifies obstacles that the team encounters and assesses the measures that the team takes to overcome these obstacles.

The questionnaire was designed based on recurring themes that surfaced when conducting the literature review on team cohesiveness. This ensured face and content validity. Furthermore, in-house pretesting was adopted to assess the suitability of the instrument. Pilot testing was also carried out using 16 subjects, selected using the same procedures and protocols adopted for the larger sample. The feedback from the pilot testing confirmed that the questionnaire was appropriate in terms of relevance and construction and adhered to the principles of wording and measurement. However, a cover page of the rationale of the study was included based on request for more information on the need for the study. To ensure clarity of instructions and purpose of the study, and to establish suitable rapport, the questionnaires were personally administered.

Statistical Analysis

The validity of the questionnaire was assessed using Factor Analysis. A principal component analysis was used to extract initial factors and an iterated principal factor analysis was performed using SPSS with an Orthogonal Varimax Rotation. Seven factors with latent roots greater than unity were extracted from the factor loading matrix and only items with loadings >0.5 were considered to be significant. Furthermore, when items were significantly loaded on more than one factor, only that with the highest value was selected. The seven factors identified confirm the seven dimensions used in this study to determine the perceived cohesiveness of teams. The reliability of the questionnaire was determined using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha, the value of which was 0.8633. This alpha coefficient indicates a very high level of internal consistency of the items and hence, a high degree of reliability. It also reflects that the dimensions reliably determine team cohesiveness.

Descriptive statistics, using frequency analyses, percentages, mean analyses and standard deviations were utilised to assess employee perceptions on the extent to which their teams are cohesive in terms of the dimensions. Inferential statistics were used to assess the perceptions of team cohesiveness and the influence of the biographical data on team cohesiveness. Inferential statistics used to test the hypotheses included correlation, analysis of variance (ANOVA) and t-test. Results were evaluated at the 1% and 5% levels of significance.

Data Analysis

Perceptions of the Cohesiveness of Teams Based on Key Dimensions of the Study

Descriptive analysis was undertaken to assess perceptions of members on the cohesiveness of their teams based on the key dimensions of the study (Table 1):-

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics – Perceived influence of key dimensions on team cohesiveness*

Dimension	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
Setting goals	18	18.49	3.25	10.55
Extent of participation	15	18.38	3.40	11.57
Communicatio n	14	18.72	2.99	8.97
Idea generation	15	18.39	3.06	9.38
Conflict management	15	18.51	3.12	9.75
Interpersonal relations	12	20.16	2.46	6.07
Managing obstacles	11	17.52	2.94	8.62

From Table 1 it is evident that employees believe that the dimensions determining the cohesiveness of their teams, in descending level of effectiveness, are:-

- Interpersonal relations (Mean = 20.16)
- Communication (Mean = 18.72)
- Conflict management (Mean = 18.51)
- Setting goals (Mean = 18.49)
- Idea generation (Mean – 18.39)
- Extent of participation (Mean = 18.38)
- Managing obstacles (mean = 17.52)

Figure 1 graphically presents team members' perceptions of the various dimensions determining their team's cohesiveness. The upper segment of each bar indicates the area of improvement needed.
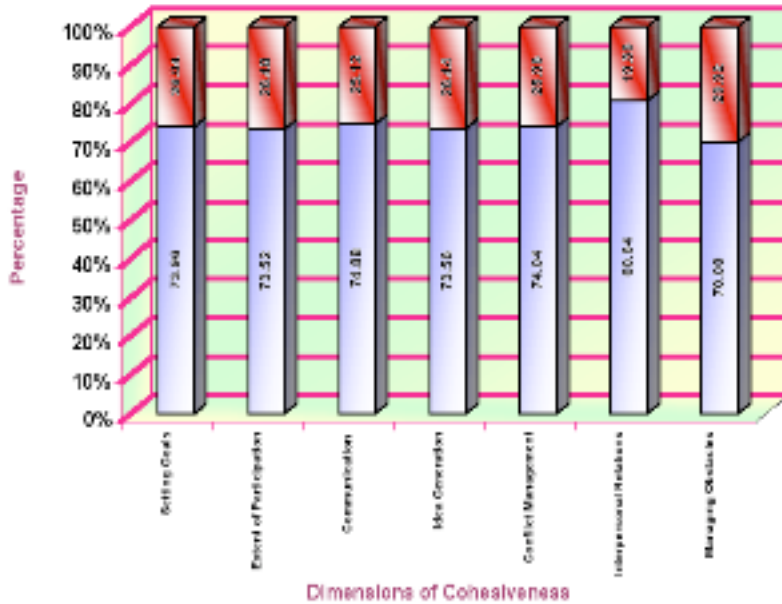
Figure 1: *Perceptions of key dimensions determining team cohesiveness (% of fulfilment and % of improvement)*

Figure 1 indicates that the dimensions of team cohesiveness need varying degrees of improvement, which in descending level are:-

- Managing obstacles (Perceived accomplishment = 70.08%, improvement = 29.92%)
- Extent of participation (Perceived accomplishment = 73.52%, improvement = 26.48%)
- Idea generation (Perceived accomplishment = 73.56%, improvement = 26.44%)
- Setting goals (Perceived accomplishment = 73.96%, improvement = 26.04%)
- Conflict management (Perceived accomplishment = 74.04%, improvement = 25.96%)
- Communication (Perceived accomplishment = 74.88%, improvement = 25.12%)
- Interpersonal relations (Perceived accomplishment = 80.64%, improvement = 19.36%).

Hypothesis 1

There exists significant intercorrelations amongst the key dimensions of the study determining team cohesiveness (setting goals and understanding them, extent of participation, communication, idea generation, conflict management, interpersonal relationships and managing obstacles) respectively (Table 2).

Table 2: *Intercorrelations amongst the key dimensions used to determine team cohesiveness*

	SG	EP	C	IG	CM	IR	MO
SG	1.000						
EP r	0.592						
p	0.000*	1.000					
C r	0.379	0.382					
p	0.003*	0.002*	1.000				
IG r	0.493	0.603	0.559				
p	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	1.000			
CM r	0.093	0.198	0.464	0.570			
p	0.475	0.126	0.000*	0.000*	1.000		
IR r	0.113	0.100	0.521	0.378	0.654		
p	0.388	0.444	0.000*	0.003*	0.000*	1.000	
MO r	-0.040	-0.135	-0.002	-0.088	0.154	0.193	
p	0.761	0.299	0.987	0.499	0.236	0.136	1.000

* p < 0.01

Key for Table 2:

SG - Setting goals and understanding them   **CM**-   Conflict Management
EP - Extent of participation   **IR**   -   Interpersonal relations
C - Communication   **MO**- Managing obstacles
IG - Idea generation

Table 2 reflects the following significant relationships amongst the dimensions of the study used to assess team cohesiveness at the 1% level of significance:-

- Between setting goals and the extent of participation, communication, and idea generation respectively.
- Between extent of participation and communication and idea generation respectively.
- Between communication and idea generation, conflict management and interpersonal relations respectively.
- Between idea generation and conflict management and interpersonal relations respectively.
- Between conflict management and interpersonal relations.

However, no significant relationships exist between:-
- Setting goals and conflict management and interpersonal relations respectively.
- Extent of participation and conflict management and interpersonal relations respectively.
- Managing obstacles and setting goals, extent of participation, communication, idea generation, conflict management and interpersonal relations respectively.

Hence, Hypothesis 1 may be partially accepted.

Table 2 indicates that the employees perceive their teams as being cohesive and effective in idea generation which correlates significantly with all the dimensions including conflict management, except managing obstacles. In addition, the greater the intercorrelations amongst the dimensions, the greater the degree of team cohesiveness. In the same vein, Table 2 clearly indicates that the team is not cohesive enough in managing obstacles.

Hypothesis 2

There is a significant difference in the perceptions of team members varying in biographical data (age, gender, race, level of education, position occupied) regarding the key dimensions determining team cohesiveness (setting goals and understanding them, extent of participation, communication, idea generation, conflict management,

interpersonal relations and managing obstacles) respectively (Table 3 and Table 4).

Table 3: *ANOVA – Age, race, position occupied, education and perceptions of team cohesiveness based on key dimensions*

D	Age		Race		Position occupied		Education	
	F	p	F	p	F	P	F	p
SG	0.581	0.630	3.668	0.017**	0.086	0.967	0.125	0.945
EP	0.476	0.700	2.170	0.101	0.303	0.823	0.421	0.738
C	0.954	0.421	0.204	0.893	0.953	0.421	1.145	0.339
IG	0.151	0.929	0.132	0.941	0.776	0.512	1.678	0.182
CM	0.874	0.460	1.207	0.315	4.389	0.008*	1.308	0.281
IR	0.871	0.461	1.043	0.380	5.248	0.003*	3.873	0.014**
MO	0.307	0.820	0.177	0.911	0.273	0.845	0.605	0.615

* $p < 0.01$
** $p < 0.05$

Key for Table 2 Dimensions (D):
SG - Setting goals and understanding them
EP - Extent of participation
C - Communication
IG - Idea generation
CM- Conflict Management
IR - Interpersonal relationships
MO- Managing obstacles

Table 3 indicates that team members in the various age groups do not differ significantly in their perceptions of the dimensions used to assess team cohesiveness (determined by setting goals and understanding them, extent of participation, communication, idea generation, conflict

management, interpersonal relations and obstacles) respectively. Hence, hypothesis 2, in terms of the influence of age, is rejected.

Furthermore, Table 3 indicates that team members from the various race groups differ significantly in their perceptions of how cohesively the team engages in setting goals and how well they understand them. No other differences show significance. In addition, it is clear from Table 3 that team members occupying varying positions differ significantly in their perceptions of conflict management and interpersonal relations respectively within the teams. No other differences show significance. Table 3 also indicates that team members with varying levels of education differ significantly in their perceptions of the interpersonal relations within the teams. No other differences show significance. Hence, hypothesis 2, in terms of varying positions, the influence of race and levels of education, may only be partially accepted.

Table 4: *t-test – Gender and perceptions of team cohesiveness based on key dimensions*

Dimension	t	p
Setting goals	0.823	0.368
Extent of participation	9.060	0.004*
Communication	3.663	0.060
Idea generation	4.229	0.044**
Conflict management	0.118	0.733
Interpersonal relations	3.922	0.052
Managing obstacles	0.025	0.874

* $p < 0.01$
** $p < 0.05$

Table 4 indicates that there is a significant difference in the perceptions of males and females regarding the extent of participation and idea generation respectively within the team. However, there is no significant difference in the perceptions of males and females regarding the remaining dimensions determining team cohesiveness. Hence, hypothesis 2, in terms of the influence of gender, may only be partially accepted.

Answers to Research Questions

The results indicate that the team members perceive the team as fulfilling the dimensions determining team cohesiveness in varying degrees. Based on team members' responses, the higher the mean score value on each dimension used to determine team cohesiveness, the greater the degree to which that dimension is perceived to exist. The mean score values were then ranked with the highest mean being 1 and the lowest mean being 7.

Setting Goals and Understanding them

With regards to team members' perceptions of setting goals and understanding them, 91.9% of the employees (68.9% agreed, 23.0% strongly agreed) indicated that regular feedback to team members is absolutely essential but was not taking place sufficiently within the team. According to New Zealand Management (2001: 11), one of the important features of a cohesive team is that the goals of the group are well understood and accepted by all. Similarly, a study undertaken by Fleming (2001) reflects that team goals need to be understood by all team members, established by the team, modified and regularly reviewed. Yeatts and Barnes (1996) believe that goals need to be clear, specific and measurable in order to promote team cohesiveness. Leadership for the Front Lines (2000: 3) found that if team members are not committed to common goals and do not have clarity about team goals, team cohesiveness would be jeopardised.

Extent of Participation

The frequency analyses indicate that 83.7% of the subjects (60.7% agreed, 23.0% strongly agreed) indicated that fundamental to team cohesiveness is each team member knowing his/her personal tasks and

objectives but this was inadequate within their teams. Yandrick (2001) cautions that teams would not be cohesive when employees work independently much more than interdependently. Similarly, Delbridge and Whitfield (2001) found that in a car assembly plant in Canada, only two thirds of workers reported being actively involved in making decisions at work and that it was limited to one's own work area or to perform a job in one's own way thus, limiting the sharing of ideas and hindering team cohesiveness.

Communication

In terms of the extent of communication within the teams, the frequency analyses indicates that 82% of the team members (60.7% agreed, 21.3 % strongly agreed) indicated that good communication between themselves and team members is an essential ingredient and was taking place. Furthermore, 83.6% of the subjects (57.4% agreed, 26.2% strongly agreed) believed that regular team meetings, which were taking place, are important for team cohesiveness. In addition, 82% of the employees (57.4% agreed, 24.6% strongly agreed) reflected that mutual acceptance and regular feedback were critical to their team's cohesiveness. Similarly, Sulon (1997), McCowen (1989), Staff Leader (2002) and Kanter (2001) emphasize the importance of clear communication and stress that teams stumble when they become so internally focused on their task that they neglect communication.

Idea Generation

The frequency analyses indicates that team members perceive that sharing and exchanging of ideas amongst team members enhances team cohesiveness. There was no consensus amongst respondents that team members shared ideas with each other. Spector (2000) believes that groups are superior to individuals in generating ideas or solutions to problems. Similarly, Thompson and Brajkovich (2003) found that teams from diverse backgrounds excel in all measures of creativity. Contrary to this, Paulus (2000) believes that groups that have heterogeneous knowledge sets may not fully explore their full range of ideas. Paulus (2000) revealed that sharing and exchanging ideas does not change the relative degree of production loss experienced by a group.

Conflict Management

In terms of perceptions of conflict management within the team, the frequency analyses reflect that 82% of the team members (54.1% agreed, 27.9% strongly agreed) indicated that open discussion among team members is an essential ingredient and was occurring within their teams. Capozzoli (1999) stresses that productive conflict resolution involves learning how to disagree over issues and situations and coming up with a solution that can benefit the entire team. Alper, Tjosvold and Law (2000) found that how team members manage their conflict can affect not only their sense of efficacy in dealing with conflicts, but their overall team performance. Alper, Tjosvold and Law (2000) deduced that teams that relied on competitive conflict were found to exhibit low levels of efficacy and reduced group performance thereby, making the team less effective. Miner (1992) found that the expression of strong emotions and opinions by group members tends to have a counterproductive effect on the generation of ideas due to inadequate conflict management.

Interpersonal Relations

The results reflect that employees believe that their teams have effective interpersonal relations which is reiterated in the frequency analyses. In terms of perceptions of interpersonal relations within the teams, the majority of the team members (86.9% - 63.9% agreed, 23% strongly agreed) indicated that trust is an essential ingredient and that team members are perceived as being trustworthy. Similarly, Nelson and Quick's (2003) study reveals that once team members establish a comfortable level of mutual trust and acceptance, they can focus their attention on the work of the group, thereby enhancing team cohesiveness. Furthermore, the frequency analyses in this study reflects that 93.5% of the team members (57.4% agreed, 36.1% strongly agreed) reflected that co-operation amongst their team members enhances team cohesiveness. In addition, 91.8% of the employees (57.4% agreed, 34.4% strongly agreed) believed that commitment to team tasks and, openness and honesty within their teams enhanced their team's cohesiveness. Research by Tierney (1999) indicates that when involved in quality relationships with team peers, individuals are more inclined to expand their role boundaries, enhance their level of behavioural involvement, and subjugate their needs for those of the group and hence, enhance interpersonal relations. However, according to the Harvard Management Communication Letter (2000), interpersonal conflicts

happen, and they must be dealt with. Fogel (1995) found that relationships in teams break down due to factors associated with the balance of control. In this regard, Capozzoli (1999) found that team members may challenge the leader, or they may isolate themselves from team discussions and this would hamper team cohesiveness.

Managing Obstacles

The results indicate that managing obstacles is a major function in the police service department yet it is perceived as requiring the greatest degree of improvement and thus, clearly calls for drastic attention. The frequency analyses in this study indicate that 80.4% of the team members (57.4% agreed, 23.0% strongly agreed) mentioned that knowing and focusing on the team's mission is an essential ingredient for managing obstacles, thereby enhancing team cohesiveness but that it was not taking place. Thoman (2000) found that when teams effectively leverage their differences and overcome obstacles, team effectiveness is enhanced. However, Govindarajan and Gupta (2001) found that unless obstacles such as differences in assumptions and beliefs in diversity are addressed, the cohesiveness of the group is likely to suffer. Similarly, Robbins (2000) believes that cross-cultural factors have the potential for increased communication problems and poses as an obstacle to team cohesiveness.

Impact of Biographical Data

The study revealed that age does not influence perceptions of the dimensions used to determine team cohesiveness. Whilst, Sulon (1997) also did not find any relationship between age and team cohesiveness, Aquino, Townsend and Scott (2001) observed a relationship between age and extent of employee participation in teams. Furthermore, in this study it was found that race does influence perceptions of cohesiveness in setting goals. Similar findings were obtained by Aquino, Townsend and Scott (2001). In addition, from this study it was deduced that position occupied does influence perceptions of conflict management and interpersonal relations used to determine team cohesiveness. However, Sulon (1997) found that occupation does not influence team cohesiveness. This study reflected that level of education does influence perceptions of interpersonal relations used to determine team cohesiveness. Sulon (1997) found that education does not influence team

cohesiveness. In addition, in this study it was observed that gender does influence perceptions of the extent of participation and idea generation used to determine team cohesiveness. Similarly, Janssen, Van De Vliert and Evert (1999) found that gender affects the extent of participation in teams.

Recommendations

It is clear that the dimensions of the study determine team members' perceptions of team cohesiveness. Team cohesiveness forms an integral part of all team functioning. It enables interaction amongst different types of people and motivates individuals towards achieving personal and team goals. Cohesive teamwork is the key factor in ensuring that teams are successful and that team members are able to work well together. Figure 2 indicates the extent to which team members believe that the dimensions used to determine team cohesiveness are being met within their teams.

Figure 2: *Dimensions determining Team Cohesiveness*
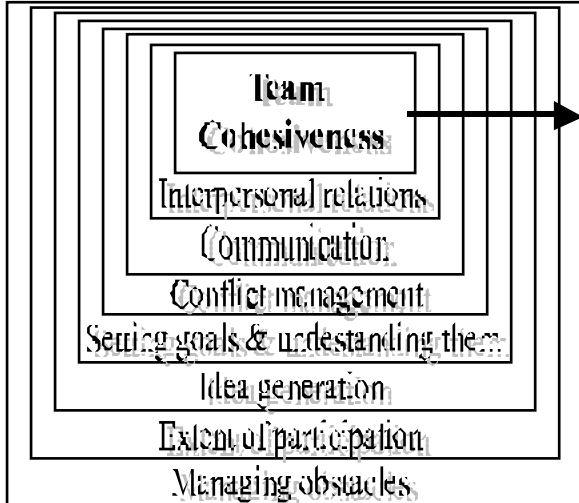
As one moves from the innermost segment of Figure 2 to the outermost segment, the perception of team members that the dimension determining team cohesiveness is satisfied diminishes and the level of improvement needed increases. Based on this, recommendations and guidelines are provided below, in descending order of improvement needed, in ensuring the effective management of each of the dimensions so as to enhance team cohesiveness:

With regards to managing obstacles:

- Create a climate within which members can challenge long-standing, outdated practices.
- Give rewards to groups/individuals that are equitable and consistent with performance.
- Develop clarity of the nature/purpose of tasks and reinforce this regularly with the team.
- Develop sense of pride among team members, for example, by giving challenging tasks, recognition of performance, feedback, guidance, responsibility for decision-making.
- Hold regular team building exercises so that male and female team members get to know and respect one another.

With regards to extent of participation:

- Everyone must be involved in team activities and decisions – encourages ownership of company goals.
- Assign personal tasks/objectives that are aligned with team goals/objectives. Evaluate on a regular basis.
- Develop clear understanding of importance of task role and contribution to team.

With regards to idea generation:

- Encourage information sharing (within teams, across branches and provinces).
- Create diverse teams – different expertise.
- Provide challenging tasks and objectives that will encourage creativity.
- Provide salient rewards for outstanding ideas and valuable input.

With regards to setting goals and understanding them:

- Clear, positive communication is needed – ensures team members fully understand team's goals.
- Regular team meetings ensure regular feedback and identification of discrepancies towards goal accomplishment.
- Evaluation sessions ensure that all team members have the same understanding of team goals and objectives.
- Encourage team members' agreement with team goals.

With regards to conflict management:

- Develop team members' conflict management skills. Hold conflict/stress management workshops.
- Encourage open and honest discussions amongst team members.
- Assess symptoms as this helps to resolve conflict in the team early.

With regards to communication:

- Constant communication is essential – regular meetings ensure face-to-face interaction.
- Develop ways in which team members get to know each other better.
- All team members should accept responsibility for the communication process.
- Adopt an open door policy to encourage employees to speak to superiors/team leaders so as to improve trust and reduce stress.
- Quarterly feedback sessions should be held with team members to discuss problems and exchange relevant information.
- Encourage peer coaching, information sharing and developmental feedback in teams.

With regards to interpersonal relations:

- Develop trust within teams by displaying integrity, loyalty, competence, consistency and openness.
- Members must work together, nurture open, honest communication and be committed.

The survival and success of the Police Services in particular, and organisations in general, are dependent upon cohesive teamwork, which should be an ongoing process as teamwork forms an integral part of

providing effective services. Furthermore, the effectiveness of Police Services depends highly on cohesive teams to combat crime and ensure the safety of citizens in the country. Likewise, the aforementioned recommendations and guidelines will enable the police service department and similar team-based organisations to improve team cohesiveness, thereby ensuring organisational survival, growth and development.

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