

Sogeti TeamPark Case Study Critique

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### Abstract

The Sogeti TeamPark project represented an innovative, organic communal work environment to improve employee engagement and satisfaction (Vohra et al, 2014). The critique examined the case study by the fitment of academically robust theories and major leadership models from three different leadership perspectives: transformational leadership, path-goal theory, and team effectiveness theory. Thorough examination of the case study through the various theories and models of leadership yielded the discovery of leadership opportunities in each discipline and a lack of leadership sustainment throughout the project life cycle. Additionally, the absence of clear project goals and team formation impeded the fully realized success of project TeamPark. The critique also provides future leadership considerations for improved Sogeti project success.

*Keywords:* leadership, theory, project

### Sogeti TeamPark Case Study Critique

This case study critique focuses on the “Sogeti’s TeamPark – Designing Intelligent Organizations for the Future” case study by Vohra et al (2014) which describes the implementation of an innovative project known as TeamPark by the Sogeti organization. This critique evaluates the execution of three main leadership styles or theories and the impact of each leadership approach on the success of this project. The three leadership styles or theories are: transformational leadership, path-goal theory, and team leadership. This critique provides background on the Sogeti TeamPark project and highlights both effective and ineffective executions of each leadership theory, expanding on possible recommendations for future Sogeti project considerations.

#### **Background on TeamPark Project**

Sogeti forged early success in the early 2000s as a largely entrepreneurial firm that served as a local professional information technology services group with strong brand and strong local customer connections (Vohra et al, 2014). As business expanded into other countries, Sogeti developed even more decentralized operational silos and coupled with a diverse multicultural environment, employees began to feel disconnected from each other and the organization as a whole (Vohra et al, 2014). Additionally, Sogeti had a project-team work environment which increased employee disconnection between groups and fed overall feelings of dissatisfaction (Vohra et al, 2014).

In an effort to improve employee satisfaction and organizational connectivity to the global workforce, Sogeti leadership saw the need to develop an innovative technological solution to serve as the collaboration platform for employee communication (Vohra et al, 2014). The idea was to create an intelligent technologically based environment that fostered social connectivity and sharing of ideas, solutions and thoughts freely and easily across all employees (Vohra et al, 2014). In turn, Sogeti would continue to foster international growth while increasing employee drive, motivation, and satisfaction; hence, project TeamPark was launched (Vohra et al, 2014). This case study provides additional information on the overall project implementation plan, including efforts to gain employee buy-in, such as, the innovation jam session and team execution challenges (Vohra et al, 2014). This case study critique also touches on the leadership aspects involved with the TeamPark project development, implementation and ongoing sustainment as well as any opportunities to address.

### **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership is a process that changes and transforms people (Northouse, 2013). Transformational leadership involves an exceptional form of influence that moves followers to accomplish more than what is usually expected of them. It is a process that often incorporates charismatic and visionary leadership (Northouse, 2013). Transformational leadership consists of four factors: charisma or idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (Northouse, 2013). Within the context of project TeamPark, the Sogeti leadership team exemplified many transformational characteristics in order to improve employee connection and engagement.

In general, Sogeti leadership incorporated idealized influence in communicating the overall mission and vision of the TeamPark project and at a high level, articulated what they wanted to achieve. Sogeti management also used inspirational motivation in that they fostered a sense of teamwork and mutual goals to inspire their team members to work towards the greater good of the company. Sogeti management used the third factor, intellectual stimulation, by utilizing an innovation jam session wherein management sought out innovative and creative ideas from employees to help define the components of TeamPark that would make it successful. Finally, Sogeti leadership incorporated individualized consideration by recognizing employee dissatisfaction and made a commitment to improve collaboration and employee connectivity by launching project TeamPark. In the opening quote of the Vohra et al (2014) case study, Michiel Boreel, the Chief Technical Officer for Sogeti states the overall intention of transformational leadership to inspire the entire organization, as follows:

This is the dawn of a new beginning. We are building a future Sogeti which collaboration and social networking are key for delivering client solutions faster, connecting the right people wherever they are, and making Sogeti, as a group, a more attractive employer. Innovation and passion for technology will thrive and grow on TeamPark, a collaboration platform that has been developed to meet the needs of our people. (p. 1)

### **Opportunities within Transformational Leadership**

While the overall vision was clearly stated above, project specific visions and goals were not stated within the case study. As mentioned by Northouse (2013), within transformational leadership, it is extremely important to deeply connect with the current problems employees face

and provide linkage between the overall vision and day to day operations. As a result, leaders and followers can fully make strong emotional connections in order to foster the motivation needed to propel successful project implementation and change organizational culture. With the examples provided by the case study, it appears that Sogeti at a high level may have understood overall issues; however, senior leadership did not connect with ongoing employee needs throughout the project which could have improved the likelihood of project success (Vohra et al, 2014). It would have been advantageous for the Sogeti senior management team to keep motivation and spirits high throughout the entire project life cycle.

### **Path-Goal Theory**

Path-Goal theory is the embodiment of leaders motivating employees to accomplish the desired outcomes or goals and focuses on how certain leadership behaviors are better suited for certain employee and task characteristics or types (Northouse, 2013). More specifically, there are four main leadership behaviors described within path-goal theory: directive, supportive, participative and achievement-oriented (Northouse, 2013). Within the context of Sogeti and the TeamPark project, participative leadership stands out as the primary leadership characteristic as it involves inviting employees to share in the decision-making process and encourages employee involvement regarding how the organization should proceed. Participative leadership theory suggests that this could result in increasing subordinate motivation to succeed (Northouse, 2013). Managers can implement path-goal theory through explicit behavioral choices that are adapted to the demands of the work environment and the needs of the employees. By doing so, leaders can dismantle impediments and improve the satisfaction of their employees (House & Mitchell, 1974).

Project TeamPark's innovation jam, a web based brainstorming event which brought together over twenty percent of Sogeti's 20,000 employees, is an example of participative leadership (Vohra et al, 2014). The event involved a large community of employees in an important decision-making process. During this session, important questions were directed at the participants, including: how to collaborate more efficiently; how to build new and closer relationships; how to use new technology; how to create new services and strong partnerships; and how to contribute to make the world a better place (Vohra et al, 2014). As a result, according to the case study, ideas were collected by lead or senior staff, who then created the framework that came to be known as TeamPark (Vohra et al, 2014).

Additionally, the case study suggests that bringing employees into the decision-making process with the innovation jam led to high engagement shortly after the TeamPark launch. The case study indicated that for this specific task, the early involvement of employees did have a clear causal effect. Specifically, employees who participated in the Innovation Jam saw themselves as co-owners of TeamPark (Vohra et al, 2014).

### **Opportunities within Path-Goal Theory Leadership**

With project TeamPark, the application of participative leadership in the innovation jam appeared to have mixed execution with mixed results. For instance, employees were encouraged to submit ideas and engage in a discussion around the future of collaboration, but all the conclusions, including distilling the aggregated topics from the submissions, were made by senior employees and not the rank and file workers (Vohra et al, 2014). Additionally, this process was conducted over a new web interface and lasted only 72 hours (Vohra et al, 2014). The unfamiliar venue and limiting timeline did not allow for a representative process through

which all employees could substantially contribute to the direction of the company. Although the degree of involvement of the staff was reasonable for such a large firm, it perhaps could have been greater if the event had given the participating body the power to make more decisions.

While not explicitly stated within the case study, the TeamPark project would have benefited from more of a combination of participative and directive leadership. Within the path-goal theory, directive leadership represents more structured performance standards and expectations regarding outcomes and deliverables. Based on this case study, limited information is provided regarding pre and post project implementation performance, employee satisfaction or overall key performance indicator improvements. Providing more baseline measurement information and ongoing project tracking feedback would have not only served as a gauge for leadership regarding project success, but also engendered confidence for all employees in project goals and mission

### **Team Effectiveness Theory**

As described by Northouse (2013), the team effectiveness theory focuses on two critical functions of performance or task accomplishment and development, referring to maintenance of the team. Team performance refers to the quality of decision making, the ability to solve problems and deliver completed work (Nadler, 1998). Team development refers to the cohesiveness to the team and the ability of the team members to meet their own needs while working with other team members (Nadler, 1998). In order to provide more of a framework for team effectiveness, Larson and LaFasto (1989) through their research, discovered eight characteristics that were generally associated with team success. Those eight characteristics are a clear and elevating goal, results-driven structure, competent team members, unified commitment,

collaborative climate, standards of excellence, external support and recognition and principled leadership (Larson and LaFasto, 1989).

For Sogeti, team effectiveness did not appear to be the strong suit for the TeamPark project. While attempts were made to engender meaningfulness into the project goals, standards, teams and overall successes, this leadership style yielded the most opportunities for improvement in the case study. The remainder of the team effectiveness section will be dedicated to opportunities and recommendations.

### **Opportunities within Team Effectiveness**

In order to be successful, team goals, component one, must be very clear and provide guidance as to whether the performance objective has been realized (Northouse, 2013). From this perspective, the goal setting process for project TeamPark appeared vague according to the case study (Vohra et al, 2014). The stated goal for the TeamPark project was to increase collaboration, connect the global workforce, and facilitate the self-perpetuating exchange of ideas among employees (Vohra et al, 2014). While timelines and milestones were set to encourage the use of the intelligence platform; there were no clear quantitative measures in place to evaluate success and only information describing the progress on adoption for TeamPark was provided (Vohra et al, 2014). In order to fully evaluate and realize success, management needed to define a set of quantitative goals at the beginning of the process and then apply valid and consistent metrics throughout the project.

Along similar lines, the results-driven structure, the second component needed for team effectiveness appeared to be lacking for the TeamPark project. Structural features that lead to effective teamwork include task design, team composition, and core norms of conduct

(Wageman et al., 2009). While teams were formed for TeamPark, the rules of team engagement were not clearly formed. According to Vohra et al (2014), the TeamPark intention was to build organic, intelligent communities, away from the traditional team ideology, by utilizing stigmergic collaboration and driving the community through sustainable innovations. They believed in group wisdom steering away from competition and bureaucratic structure, but leveraging subject matter experts to create a better work environment (Vohra et al, 2014). According to the case study, TeamPark by design had no real structure. Everyone could freely link up with others in any manner desired. While having limited to no structure could be appealing to some, it could also lead to management difficulties, such as too much time socializing with employees rather than working or being involved in areas that are not pertinent to the employee's work. At the bare minimum some protocols for engagement should be set so that team members know what is considered as appropriate and expected.

Regarding competent team members and a unified commitment, the third and fourth components in team effectiveness, the TeamPark project formed teams designed to represent the different geographic locations, but appeared to lack full representation of subject matter experts, including human resources, marketing and information technology to ensure appropriate and relevant employee linking or virtual groups as well as technical support. In turn, team unification, another characteristic of effective team theory, could not be formulated. In the case of TeamPark, communities were formed on their own without any direction from management (Vohra et al, 2014). While it would be fair to surmise that over a period of time, interest groups would form naturally, but this lack of direction could translate into wasted employee time and increased frustration.

The ability of a team to collaborate, the fifth component in team effectiveness, is essential to team effectiveness (Northouse, 2013). One of the key elements that would build an atmosphere of collaboration is the presence of trusting relationships (Northouse, 2013). This aspect was seen as a major issue with the TeamPark initiative as the Sogeti Management was faced with issues of trust, access, and data security (Vohra et al, 2014). Given the limited team structure and boundaries, the team collaboration and trust was nonexistent and, in turn, developed obstacles for successful project acceptance and implementation.

Developing standards of excellence, the sixth component of team effectiveness, provides team members with expectations regarding intra-team dynamics and function (Northouse, 2013). In particular, members may feel pressure to perform at their highest levels and in order to meet intra-team expectations (Northouse, 2013). According to the case study, the TeamPark initiatives did not specify or describe team standards and provided no set ways of reviewing results with any clear objective for giving feedback or rewarding people for performing at or above expectations (Vohra et al, 2014). Thus, Sogeti employees may have had more flexibility on how to use the platform, but could have resulted in people having different perceptions and expectations.

According to Larson & LaFasto (1989), teams can achieve excellence if they are given the resources to do their jobs and are recognized for team accomplishment. External support and recognition, the seventh component of team effectiveness, allows employees the opportunity to succeed if resources are provided. Therefore, in order to keep employees engaged throughout the project, praise and recognition were offered (Northouse, 2013). For the TeamPark project, it appeared that resources were provided regarding the focus and scope of the project; however,

there was very little mention of resources for recognition or reward by Sogeti (Vohra et al, 2014). In order to keep employees motivated and optimistic, recognition is key (Northouse, 2013).

Principled leaders can enhance the effectiveness of teams by keeping the team focused on its goals, maintaining a collaborative climate, building confidence among team members, setting priorities and managing performance (Larson & LaFasto, 1989). While the management of the TeamPark initiative energized a collaborative climate, additional work was needed to build employee confidence, measure effectiveness and monitoring performance.

### **Conclusion**

In summary, the Sogeti TeamPark project, which aimed to improve employee collaboration and satisfaction, represented elements of strong transformational leadership beginnings, such as an optimistic project kickoff and strong leadership aspirations. However, the lack of clear and specified project goals, team formation and development and process standards appeared to have impeded full project implementation and ultimately, project success. Moving forward, it would be important to consider these shared observations and recommendations in order to increase the likelihood of success for future projects.

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