

Workshop on Human Resources Management and Training

Building Resilience in Statistical Organizations

Session 3: Developing skills and capability

Team building: how a successful training experience may support a changing organization

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Good morning and thank you very much for this opportunity to describe an interesting training experience carried out by the Italian Institute of Statistics last year. First of all, let me briefly introduce myself. I'm a researcher and I currently work in Istat staff training and I deal with management training and upskilling of human resources. In the past few years my team has focused in particular its activities in supporting the modernization process. The development of human resources, in fact, is part of and has to go along with the modernization of the statistical production and services.

Where is our training experience from? The context of modernization

Due to the increasing demand for more accessible and integrated statistics and to the containment of public spending my Institute has recently implemented a new statistical production system and, accordingly, a new organizational model. Following this innovation, new roles and new competences are required to achieve the Institute's goals. The transition from a 'silos' to a 'matrix' production system demands to improve, among others, team building skills. Furthermore, the functions supporting statistical production have been centralized and the new organizational model requires a human resources management strategy capable of integrating professionals with diversified technical and management skills.

This presentation will describe how to develop such skills and create efficient working groups.

What about our training experience? Purposes and methodology

The name of the course is "Team building and communication". Why this addition in the title? Because communication plays a key role in working relationships within groups and deserves dedicated attention.

The course aims at improving the skills, the knowledge and the attitudes needed to work in group and to manage internal communication. It has been designed in management training area, but we decided to open participation to all personnel and not just reserve it for managerial roles. Actually all team members contribute to achieving team's goals regardless of their role.

In more detail, the course aims at developing in the trainees:

- the ability to team up and integrate the different experiences and skills present in the groups;
- a greater awareness of the importance of individual contribution and of mutual interdependence within the groups;
- communication, active listening and giving feedback abilities.

The focus of this training is on the dynamics that develop within working groups. At the start the class is immediately divided into small groups, to facilitate the observation of these dynamics, and each activity, since the initial presentation round, is based on a team working way.

The proposed methodology combines frontal introductions, classroom exercises and debriefing on the activities carried out.

Within this framework, the trainer acts as a facilitator, who makes sure that participants are actively involved throughout the course. The facilitator engages participants and encourages them to think about how they are carrying out their activities and to analyze their usual way of working within a group. The group activities are entirely experiential and require strong physical, cognitive and emotional involvement.

The exercises are intended as opportunities to understand the different roles group members can play and whether a group is capable to integrate and enhance the various individual skills. The activities performed show the functioning mechanisms of the groups: how a meeting is conducted, problems are solved, decisions are made, feedback is given and so on.

The materials and ideas for the exercises don't have a statistical basis, because they are pretexts for understanding what happens inside the groups. The contents of the work aren't important, the point being how to work together.

A special focus in the course is dedicated to the Belbin's model on team roles. As known, the research carried out by Belbin in the 1970s discovered that the success for a team doesn't depend on factors such as intellect but more on behaviour and that the most successful teams are made up of a diverse mix of behaviours. The Belbin's model is applied in the course to recognize the different roles played in the groups: coordinator, innovator, implementer, completer finisher, etc. When the exercises end, the participants are invited to declare which role they have played themselves and which roles have been interpreted by other members and to analyze the different characteristics. The final debriefing is really useful to understand how important the team roles selection is for the team success.

Inside the training experience

The exercises aim at realizing concrete products. The main expected product is the realization of a video clip on the importance of statistics in everyday life; the title is "The numbers count ...". The activities performed in the various editions of the course were video recorded. The video clips were greatly appreciated by the participants and stimulated their reflection and their creativity. I'd

like to present a couple of video clips to capture the atmosphere and the types of relations developed within the class and the active involvement of the trainees.

Before to start I'll translate the short dialogues for you.

First video

The first character can't orient himself in an elevator to reach the ninth floor.

The second character is a bartender who enters into the room and shouts: "coffee for everyone!"

The third character is a woman who reminds to herself: "my mother always told me that I had to have the right numbers ..."

The final focus is on the Statistical yearbook of Istat, which has the right numbers!

Second video

Mother and daughter would like to reach the station and ask which bus they have to take.

The answer is the number 529, but this takes them somewhere else.

They ask another person who indicates them the right number: 592.

The right numbers count, even in this case ...

Satisfaction questionnaires

From May 2017 on we have been realizing fourteen editions of the course Team building and communication. Each class consists of 15 participants, so more than two hundred employees have been formed.

At the end of each course a satisfaction questionnaire has been filled in by the trainees. The average ratings are very high and the scores decidedly uniform, as shown in this table:

ITEM	Average	St. deviation
Trainer – Contents	9,0	0,6
Trainer - Communicative efficacy	9,2	0,5
Trainer - Classroom management	9,2	0,4
Training planning - course/objective consistency	8,9	0,6
Training planning - theory/practice balance	9,1	0,6
Training planning – teaching tools	8,4	0,8
Organizational support	9,2	0,6
Usability in the work context	8,7	1,0
Overall satisfaction	9,1	0,4

** The scores on each item range from 1 to 10*

The quality of the teaching is highly appreciated, as well as the training planning, well balanced between theoretical parts and practical parts and coherent with the course objectives. High score also for the applicability to the work context, which remains a key element for the good success of a course. If we add to this framework some particularly significant comments, released in the open fields by some trainees, the strengths of this proposal are very clear:

“This course should be mandatory for everyone, such as the safety course ...”

“The relevance of the course topics, that concern our way to get in touch with people, doesn’t impact exclusively on our way of working but on our life in general”

“I consider this course the highest educational experience I have never made in my life, because it allowed me to discover new skills that I didn’t imagine to hold”

“Finally a useful and concrete training course! I would also add “funny” for the kind of exercises that allowed us to reconstruct the theoretical framework through practical and engaging activities”

The comments have not only expressed appreciation but also clear indications on how to further develop the training path. Several participants proposed to add a follow-up day, after a few months, to examine the applicability of the concepts learned and to introduce training reinforcements.

As all those involved were very satisfied with this training activity, we are considering it as a best practice to be shared with other organizations. At the same time we are planning both other new editions and follow up sessions for the past ones.