Intraprofessional Team Building

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This article discusses the importance of team building between occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants and the relationship of teamwork to the effectiveness of service delivery within the profession of occupational therapy. If team members’ needs are not satisfied, dysfunctional intraprofessional teams result. Team building is based on the satisfaction of three areas of individual need: (a) ministration, which leads to mutual respect; (b) mastery or effective performance; and (c) maturation or personal growth and professional socialization. A better understanding and appreciation of the roles of therapist and assistant and their relationships can resolve the team deficits. A developmental team chart that uses a systems theory model as an organizing framework is presented as an action plan for team building. Suggestions are made to academic and fieldwork educators and professional and technical clinicians to strengthen intraprofessional relationships in occupational therapy.

The Long Range Plan adopted by the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) in 1975 identified the goals and prioritized the profession’s objectives to reflect the concerns of the membership. One objective challenges the Association to “clarify and support the role of the Occupational Therapist Registered (OTR), the Certified Occupational Therapy Assistant (COTA) and the Occupational Therapy Aide in the context of the occupational therapy profession” (p. 1). There is a need for increased attention to this objective in light of the current maldistribution of available personnel and apparent employment shortages and attrition patterns in some parts of the country (AOTA, 1985). It appears that in areas with large numbers of both therapists and assistants, assistants are often not effectively used or not hired at all. This results in a loss of job satisfaction, decreased commitment, and attrition for assistants. Attrition can result in a significant loss of human resources within the profession and the ultimate erosion of the Association’s financial base. When assistants are underused, therapists have to provide more direct service. This may not be cost-effective and may limit the expansion of professional level services (Gilfoyle, 1986).

Resolving these concerns requires increased attention and appreciation of the value of the assistant/therapist team. Intraprofessional team building in occupational therapy is critically important to the vitality and expansion of the profession. Teamwork must be a cognizant process; knowledge and multiple skills are required in order for therapists and assistants to work together successfully. The skills most directly related to team development include the ability to identify and satisfy the needs of co-workers. A major factor contributing to job dissatisfaction, decreased commitment, and attrition is the absence of need satisfaction among team members. This is the issue addressed in the paper.

Causal Map

The causal map developed by the authors (Figure 1) provides an organizing framework to illustrate the relationships between need satisfaction and the health of the profession. The map represents the occupational therapy profession as a system. Cause and effect relationships between parts of the system can be explored in relation to the whole system using a causal map (Roberts & Anderson, 1983). The map identifies and describes personal and professional subsystems and their interrelationships.

Educational Process: Knowledge and Attitudes

The first variable in the system is the educational process. Both professional and technical programs are
Overview

The driving force in the system is the educational process. If it is successful, the student will graduate and enter the field with a basic understanding of meeting administration and mastery needs. When an individual's ministration and mastery needs are met, maturation can occur. The quality of teamwork is enhanced and continuously reinforced by the satisfaction of these three needs.

Personal Subsystem

As a person matures, there is an increased interest and ability to participate in self-enrichment activities. Such participation enables further socialization within the profession. Increased socialization in one's career as well as involvement in self-enrichment activities leads to personal growth. As maturation is reinforced, a climate is created that facilitates appreciation and support for continued involvement in self-enrichment activities.

Professional Subsystem

Effective teamwork evolves when people's ministration, mastery, and maturation needs are met and people are able to interact in a manner that will help them grow. As this occurs in a work setting, productivity will increase. This kind of teamwork provides quality care. Both productivity and quality care will have an effect on the demand for service as other health professionals, administrators, patients, and the public gain respect for occupational therapy services. The demand for service has implications for the employment outlook. As jobs increase, more people will be interested in entering the field and will enroll in educational programs. The increased demand for occupational therapy personnel contributes to the health and stability of the profession as a whole.

Whole System

Both the professional and personal subsystems interconnect and loops are formed. All of the loops in the diagram are reinforcing loops. If the relationships are positive as described, then the health of the system can grow at an exponential rate. However, if there is a decrease or problem at any point in the system, it will have a negative effect on the organization. For example, negative effects may be manifested as increased attrition, loss of professional identity, and an eroded financial base.

To prepare students for teamwork, academic and fieldwork educators must value both levels of the profession and demonstrate this through their behavior as well as through their course content. When instilled with the knowledge and the will to work together, practitioners are better able to satisfy the needs of patients and co-workers alike.

Team Building Within the System

Working with others on a team may be understood as a process of satisfying a contractual relationship in
which all members continuously seek to meet their respective needs. The idea of this psychological contract was originated by Levinson (1962), a clinical psychologist who studied the mental health of people in a work setting.

Levinson and colleagues observed workers entering a new company and noted a process among employees of fulfilling mutual expectations and satisfying mutual needs. They described this action as reciprocation (Levinson, 1962). According to his observations, an individual entering a work situation has certain ongoing expectations and needs, most of which are subconscious. Every person beginning a career or a new job hopes that the work environment, the job itself, and the relationships with supervisors and other team members will fulfill these needs and expectations. If the reciprocity is successful, the behavioral by-products are characteristic of people who are mentally healthy. According to Levinson (1962), people exhibit behaviors like the following:

1. They treat others as individuals. This means they accept and appreciate the differences in people and are able to establish satisfying relationships with others who are different from themselves.
2. They are flexible under stress. Stress as defined here would include both internal and environmental pressures.
3. They obtain gratification from a wide variety of sources: people, ideas, tasks, interests, and values.
4. They accept their own limitations and strengths. Persons with realistic self-concepts neither overvalue nor undervalue their own abilities.
5. They are active and productive, that is, they use their abilities in the interest of service to others and their own self-enhancement.

In order for these characteristics to develop in team members, the three needs identified in the causal map must be satisfied. These are ministration, mastery, and maturation.

Ministration

Ministration needs include the desire to feel close to others in the work setting, to feel supported, guided, and safe. Occupational therapy team members must feel accepted, trusted, and included to have their ministration needs satisfied and to build mutual respect.

Accepting. Acceptance is the foundation of an effective team and refers to the act of receiving another person favorably. It also implies the approval of or belief in the worth of another individual. The absence of approval can create conflict. There will always be conflicts in work groups; therefore, team members must continuously reinforce acceptance. Communication habits and mind sets either enhance relationships or impair them. Personal styles of interaction can sometimes interfere with the ability to communicate an accepting attitude. Mutual understanding and cohesiveness are the healthy results of acceptance (Howe & Schwartzberg, 1986).

Trusting. Trust implies faith in another's goodness and competence. Those who trust are open to the influence of co-workers and are capable of interdependence. Trusting cues evoke trusting behaviors from others (Filley, 1975). It is best to assume that co-workers can be trusted rather than to initially assume the opposite. However, trust cannot be dictated and supervisors must create the environment to allow it to grow.

Including. Ministration needs can also be satisfied through the use of specific team building methods that include team members not only within but also outside of the work setting. Some examples are the establishment of group traditions, the repeating of anecdotes related to group activities; and the providing of social occasions that offer opportunities for people to see each other from a different perspective (Bormann & Bormann, 1980). This creates a greater personal interest in and appreciation of others. Team members can learn to rely on each other in different ways. This helps to create the feeling of belonging, which is essential to meeting ministration needs.

Respecting. Respect is the outcome of accepting, trusting, and including. There are many actions that symbolize respect. When members perceive an imbalance in the signs of respect given to them, teams often break down (Turner & Weed, 1983). In a nationwide survey, occupational therapy assistants identified the concern that they are not offered the appropriate regard by some occupational therapists (AOTA, 1981). This concern was expressed by assistants in regions of the country with large numbers of assistants and therapists. Occupational therapy personnel need to develop the capability to quickly recognize strengths in all members of the team and then reinforce those strengths for one another in the work situation.

Ministration is a process, not an act. Daily activities make up the process. The developmental team chart (see Figure 2) indicates that ministration needs must be met in the beginning stages of team development and maintained throughout the team's life. The need for ministration is often not recognized when, in fact, ministration skills need to be identified and modeled during the educational process and further developed in clinical practice. The lack of education in this area contributes to the problem. Although ministration is essential to satisfying work relationships, it is often neglected when work tasks appear to...
be overwhelming. Time must be put aside for meeting this basic need. Supervisors set the standards for the kinds of interactions that will occur among team members; however, each team member must have well developed communication skills and the willingness to let supervisors know how much support is needed. To satisfy the ministration needs of others, each therapist and assistant must have confidence in the good will and competence of the other team members. The bonding and cohesiveness that results enables members to adapt and change with the demand of different situations. A climate of psychological freedom will then exist that encourages the expression of feelings and different points of view (Howe & Schwartzberg, 1986).

Mastery

Team members who are sensitive to mastery needs will allow each other an appropriate measure of control early in the work experience. People who have opportunities to influence the environment will persevere at work-related tasks and demonstrate a greater commitment to the work situation and ultimately to the profession (Caplow, 1976). Supervisors and team members combine their energy to meet mastery needs by exploring roles, influencing one another, and reviewing performance. Member and supervisory tasks are outlined in Figure 2.

Exploring Roles. Entry level competencies for occupational therapy personnel are defined by AOTA and affirmed by the educational programs. Each new member of a working team has specific responsibilities, which are defined in formal job descriptions. In addition, there is an intangible set of standards that governs the behavior of all members in that position. However, roles must be flexible to allow for the uniqueness of each individual. This permits personal development of skills and performance beyond the entry level.

Each individual who assumes the role of therapist or assistant will influence it and modify it according to his or her own personality, values and abilities and the strengths and weaknesses of the other team members. As team members gain experience and knowledge, roles should change so that each individual’s interest and expertise can be used.

A certain amount of overlap in roles is inevitable as members of the team work together. Supervisors are often uncertain how to manage the discomfort associated with this fact. It is unfortunate that the anxiety connected with role overlap may cause some occupational therapy managers to avoid hiring personnel from both levels of the profession.

A team that remains open to a periodic review of roles and an examination of overlap can usually deal effectively with such anxiety (Horwitz, 1970). This open review is termed role negotiation and enables the team to accommodate growth and find an appropriate balance in the integration of the new changes.

Influencing. Healthy workers have a desire to grow and satisfy increasingly higher levels of mastery needs. Supervisors who recognize this desire will use a policy of participative management to make such growth possible. Entire teams can participate to some degree in determining policies and defining priorities and thus have some influence on their work environment.

When work is prescribed, people tend to be less committed to the job, exert less energy in performance, and feel less responsible for the outcome. This reinforces the departmental and individual status quo. Team members must be allowed an appropriate amount of influence so that they can continue to gain mastery and increase their productivity as well as role satisfaction.

Reviewing. Through periodic review old problems can be solved and new problems prevented. This reinforces mastery. It is helpful if the entire team reviews individual and group task performance and departmental procedures. Self-review, peer review, and supervisory review should be built into the work schedule on an ongoing basis.

Maturation

As mastery needs are satisfied, people may remain at a plateau for a period of time to integrate their skills. At some point occupational therapy team members will feel motivated by either an internal or external source to seek out new learning experiences. This is the need for maturation. Maturation includes renewing professional and personal goals, taking risks to achieve them, and empowering others in this process.

Risking and Achieving. There are some opportunities for purposeful risk taking in a work environment; however, remaining in the same environment usually offers security rather than risk taking opportunities. To develop fully, occupational therapy personnel must seek out different arenas of interaction, including continuing education, involvement in state and national association activities, or participating in research projects. Change is inherent in any system; therefore, risk taking is essential in achieving self-sufficiency and satisfaction.

Empowering. To empower others one must think and respond in an allocentric manner. Supervisors can be helpful to team members by periodically reviewing goals and encouraging their employees to discuss their professional goals not directly related to the work experience. When supervisors and other team members are open to a periodic review of their own role, they often gain a better perspective on the role of others and are able to make constructive suggestions.
**Figure 2**

**Developmental Team Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage of Team Development</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Supervisor’s tasks</th>
<th>Team Members’ Tasks</th>
<th>Communication Issues</th>
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</table>
| I. INITIATION STAGE       | Exploration and definition of member roles and responsibilities within the context of team and work settings. | Prior to and in the beginning phase of team formation, individuals may experience self-doubt, lack of trust, role ambiguity, and a degree of powerlessness in the work setting. | Promote atmosphere of acceptance and trust:  
  - State expectations openly  
  - Encourage discussion of members’ expectations  
  Encourage commitment to team building by helping members to:  
  - Identify skills, areas of strength and interest  
  - Provide opportunities to increase self-esteem  
  Provide general definition and direction for newly formed team:  
  - Define the situation and resources available  
  - Define roles and responsibilities for team members | Learn and explore role expectations.  
Begin to share resources, identify own areas of expertise and interests. | Express anxieties and insecurities of new relationships.  
Verbalize support for team efforts.  
Demonstrate acceptance and begin to develop trust. |
| IV. TRANSITION STAGE      | Team members experience increased anxieties, defensiveness and struggles for control. Reclarification and adjustments of roles are evident. Group norms are forming. Relationship issues are important at this stage. | Tasks are identified and achieved.  
Team members experience cohesion and productivity. Conflicts are dealt with openly and are effectively managed. | Refine leadership skills.  
Allow team members more autonomy and support development of their professional skills.  
Provide liaison functions for team with the external organization.  
Help team members find solutions to difficult problems; provide resources and support services.  
Assess and evaluate work done relative to the team’s overall performance. | Participate fully as a team member in the planning, decision-making, and execution of tasks.  
Clarify personal goals.  
Ask for needed direction/support from supervisor.  
Participate in evaluation of task completion.  
Develop sense of mastery. | Develop skills, gain confidence.  
Learn about the organizational structure.  
Commit self to team work.  
Begin to identify and deal with conflicts openly.  
Verbalize group norms and values  
Encourage team affiliation by engaging in community building activities. |
| III. WORKING STAGE        |关系 issues are important at this stage. | |  
Communicate support, and challenge members through feedback.  
Discuss how methods of problem solving, decision making, and conflict management occur in the team. | | |
members are interested in each other's ambitions, they can increase motivation. The team becomes a power base with members supporting one another in new ventures (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Confidence grows and members are instilled with purpose.

### Effective Teamwork

Effective teams are not formed simply because people's work is related. The development of a team must be a conscious process enhanced by a supportive climate, a knowledgeable supervisor, and member commitment. The chart presented in Figure 2 can be used as an assessment and intervention tool to develop more cohesive work groups. Team development is described in terms of life stages. Each stage is identified by its specific characteristics, by the responses needed from the supervisor, and the responsibilities of team members. These life stages are not absolute and often overlap, but they provide a framework for understanding team development. Teams are unique and experience stages according to their own patterns. The evolution of a team also depends on the stages which have preceded it (Brill, 1976; Corey, 1981; Hagberg, 1984).

### Productivity and Quality Care

Teamwork leads to productivity and quality care as indicated on the causal map (see Figure 1). To be productive is to accomplish or achieve. The productivity of service organizations depends on the efficiency with which human and material resources are used and the effectiveness of the services provided (Heaton, 1977).

In a work setting productivity standards are established by the supervisor. These identify the quantity of work that a given employee can be expected to produce (Schell, 1985). In developing these standards, resources must be organized and monitored so that service is rendered at a reasonable cost. Cost-effectiveness is a critical factor in the delivery of occupational therapy services. In facilities where only therapists are employed, cost-effectiveness is difficult to achieve. Managers who hire therapists and assistants are promoting the team concept and efficient, cost-effective treatment. This kind of staffing pattern should allow members to explore program development; develop new assessment and treatment tools; perform more evaluations; pursue research projects; and develop improved supervisory skills. According to the causal map (see Figure 1), these activities contribute to personal growth and improved patient care.
which, in turn, should result in increased prestige for the department and ultimately the entire profession.

Summary

Cooperative, effective teamwork between therapists and assistants is important in maintaining the vitality and well-being of the occupational therapy profession.

Integration is the process that brings a system together for unified functioning. Teamwork can be described as a process of reciprocation that leads to interdependence. In order for team members to achieve interdependence, each member must first achieve a level of independence. This is accomplished through the careful consideration of the minimization and mastery needs of each individual. Professional socialization is enhanced as individuals are empowered through the satisfaction of maturation needs. When these needs are met, employees are satisfied, productive, and respectful of each other. When these needs are not met, however, individuals can experience personal and professional dissatisfaction, and effective teamwork cannot occur.

The ineffective utilization of personnel has had a negative impact on the profession; it leads to a loss of professional identity and an increased attrition rate. This makes it difficult for the profession to achieve its long range plan concerning role clarification, appropriate utilization of occupational therapy personnel, and expansion of services.

To address these concerns, we make the following recommendations:

Recommendations for Academic and Fieldwork Educators:

1. When introducing the role delineation, provide additional course content related to supervision and the use of creative partnerships through team development.
2. Model and demonstrate behaviors that reflect mutual appreciation of all team members.
3. Provide fieldwork opportunities for students and new clinicians to develop entry level supervisory skills.
4. Document and publish patient case studies demonstrating how effective teamwork has contributed to high-quality care of patients and the personal development of occupational therapy personnel.

Recommendations for Therapists:

1. Examine tasks performed, evaluate them, and negotiate toward role change for optimal personnel utilization.
3. Identify and pursue areas for personal and professional development.

Recommendations for Assistants:

1. Develop the ability to clearly communicate the role delineation of the assistant at entry and advanced levels.
2. Demonstrate commitment to the profession.
3. Identify and pursue areas for personal and professional development.

It is the authors' belief that the consideration of these recommendations and the study of the relationships diagrammed in the causal map will enable therapists and assistants to work interdependently. Effective teamwork can lead to increased demand for occupational therapy services which will result in greater strength and recognition for the profession.

References


