

Working Paper

How Work Teams Understand and Overcome Performance Pressure? A Qualitative Investigation of Project Teams in India

Anshu Sharma

Assistant Professor (Jindal Global Business School, Sonipat)

Abstract

Purpose: The rise of high-performance work organizations (HPWOs) have created new challenges of intense work demands and performance pressure. Although studies in the past has explored psychological processes of how individuals under performance pressure. There are limited studies that have explored the mechanisms of performance pressure as a collective team-level phenomenon. Hence, the present study explores the phenomenon of how work teams understand, perceive and overcome performance pressure. The primary research question constituted of three broad questions: (i) how do teams understand performance pressure; (ii) how do teams appraise performance pressure; and (iii) how do teams cope with performance pressure.

Design/methodology/approach: The study used qualitative case research method and examined the lived-in experiences of eight project teams (sample of 42 team members and 8 team leaders) in a financial research & consultancy firm based in India catering to over 200 institutional clients globally including leading Fortune 100 companies in the investment banking and asset management sector. Data was collected using in-depth interviews and thematic analysis was done using QSR-NVivo as the qualitative data analysis tool to arrive at the dominant themes.

Findings: The thematic analysis of qualitative data explained how team members understood and perceived performance pressure. Data analysis also provided insights into the way teams gather social resources in the form of team member socio-emotive support, helping behaviors and emotional contagion that in turn builds team cohesions and drives the team to overcome performance pressure.

Research implications: The current study offers theoretical implications in various ways. First, this is one of the few studies to focus on performance pressure experienced and understood as a collective team-level phenomenon in work teams unlike majority of studies where the level of inquiry is individual or sports teams. Second, the study embeds its' arguments in the JD-R model to explain the interplay between performance pressure as a challenging job demand and teams' social resources as a job resource integrated with emotional contagion & crossover effects of socio-emotive support of team members.

Practical implications: The study offers practical implications both HR and line managers in team-based organizations for improving opportunities of team member bonding as a socio-emotive mechanism of overcoming performance pressure. Taking insights from study findings, organizations can create interventions to enhance team cohesiveness by promoting socio-emotive exchange between team members.

Originality/value: The study is novel as it offers new insights by qualitatively exploring the phenomenon of how teams understood, perceived and overcome performance pressure in project work teams in India. It further adds to the literature of team processes by theoretically embedding the findings in job demands-resources model and emotional contagion-crossover theory. The study offers a broad theoretical framework which contributes to the field of knowledge.

Keywords – work teams; performance pressure; emotional contagion; qualitative; JD-R