Essay Writing

Management

Annotated example

The first year Management essay on the following pages was written in response to a case study concerning Julia, the new member of an executive team. The case study provided information on what happened at a meeting where Julia gave a presentation:

> *Why is Julia experiencing difficulties in the executive team and what actions can be taken to remedy or improve the situation?*

OUTLINE

Thesis

Aim of the essay and outline of contents.
- helping Julia with interpersonal skills and building trust
- conflict management and team building
- definition of teams and team building.

Point

Julia is experiencing difficulties because she doesn't feel part of the executive team.

Point

There are poor working relationships throughout the company.

Point

Part of Julia's problem is that the executive team is a male dominated environment.

Transition

Transition from identifying problems to discussing solutions.

Recommendations

- Julia has to: improve her communication skills,
- participate in discussions,
- has to build relations of trust,
- communicate concisely,
- develop conflict resolution skills,
- improve how the group functions as a team.

Conclusion

The suggested solutions would benefit not only Julia but also the group.

ANNOTATIONS TO THE ESSAY

Annotations in the right hand column highlight significant features of the essay, such as structure and how points are developed with evidence to build up the argument.

Example: student essay	
This essay identifies the reasons why the case study focus, Julia, is experiencing difficulties functioning in the executive team. It also proposes strategies which should help Julia to remedy or improve the situation. The strategies outlined involve helping her with interpersonal skills. They also include some guidelines for building trust as well as for collaborating with her fellow team members. In addition, guidelines are outlined for managing conflict, as well as the concept of teams and what she needs to do in order to become part of one. A team has been defined in the literature as two or more individuals who work together toward a common objective (Whetten & Cameron 1995, p. 545). Team building is the term commonly given to intervention techniques designed to improve the functioning of a group (Dunford 1992, p. 118).	*management essays often have report features (headings, aims, recommendations).* *thesis statement could be clearer here (eg specify main factors)* *defines concepts*
One reason Julia is experiencing difficulties is she does not feel part of the executive team, and she has different goals to them. The group is made up of managers who are in charge of various areas at WTC. She is the newest senior executive. The other managers know each other well and have worked together for many years. They are familiar with the mechanics of the executive team, whereas Julia is not. At her first few meetings with the executive team she still felt out of place. Furthermore, the other managers are mostly concerned with the company's main products (things), whereas Julia has to manage human resources (people). This means that the other managers have similar goals but these goals are different to Julia's goals.	*topic sentence:* *claim addresses first part of essay question: why is Julia experiencing difficulties in the executive team?* *supporting information*
A related issue to Julia's isolation within the executive team is her non-participation in the team's decision making. For example, in the meeting she did not contribute to the discussion at all. She was therefore left out of the decision making process. When she tried to join in the discussion she got cut off by the managing director. The executives were guilty of groupthink because Julia did not steer the discussion in the right direction or correct any misunderstandings. Groupthink involved unintentional suppression of critical thoughts where group members are so concerned to maintain group unity that they become strongly inclined to agree with the proposals put forward by the leader or a majority of the group (Dunford 1992, p. 113).	*topic sentence* *claim, and connection to previous point supporting evidence* *theoretical analysis of problem*
Another reason Julia is experiencing difficulties is that there are poor working relationships throughout the company. These poor working relationships exist at managerial levels as well as on the shop floor. These problems are particularly significant for Julia in her role as the Human Resources Manager. She needs to find a way of building relationships between managers and workers at the company so that productivity can increase. However, her own poor relationship with the executive team exacerbates this problem.	*new point: there are poor working relationships throughout the company*
Perhaps the most significant problem for Julia is the male dominated nature of the executive. As a female executive in a male-dominated environment Julia does not seem to be taken seriously. It is not mentioned in the case study but it could be assumed that the executive managers are not accustomed to having a female in the executive meeting. The reason for the assumption is that they do not seem to have respect for her point of view. They also regularly talk about football at the start of a meeting which is not commonly a sport in which women are interested.	*new point: executive team is a male dominated environment* *supporting evidence*

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Example: student essay

Solutions to these identified difficulties of isolation, poor working relationships, and the male dominated environment are the focus of the next section. All of these solutions involve improving interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills are one of the basics of team building. They involve strategies such as open communication, assertiveness, participating in discussions and building trust

transition

overview of main points for second section

Communication and presentation

When communicating it is important to try and positively address difficulties: to identify negative thinking and identify desired outcomes of interactions (Tingley 1996, pp. 14-15). Julia will have to look at what she wants as the outcome of her interaction with the executive team, and focus on how she can positively address this. This will help her communication with them to be specific and focussed.

headings to organise

recommendation: Julia has to improve her communication skills

Being assertive

Julia needs to be more assertive in her presentations to the executive. She will have to prepare thoroughly for the next presentation. One of the points that she has to keep in mind is that the first ten minutes is enormously important (Jeffries & Bates 1983, p. 81). She will have to attract the team's attention at the outset. She could also include some of the concerns that the executives might have and solutions to these concerns. It is very important for her to show the urgency and seriousness of the problems. They have got to come to terms with this before looking at the solutions such as having teams. 'Do not tell them to become a team' rather demand performance from them (Katzenbach & Smith 1993, p. 264). She should emphasise performance and this in turn will force the company to work in teams. It is better for her to establish and achieve a short term goal so that she can have the confidence to work with the executives and they can be confident working with her.

recommendation: Julia has to be more assertive when presenting to the executive

how she should do this

Participating in discussions

Julia should contribute to discussions and clarify misunderstandings. It is best to clarify any misunderstandings as soon as they arise, so that one can steer the discussion (Jeffries & Bates 1983, p. 84). She should persist in her attempts to participate in discussions, even if she gets cut-off, or interrupted. The other members will soon realise that she needs to have a say as well. Is she does not persist with it, the other members will probably think that she does not have anything of importance to say or she is not sufficiently prepared for the meeting.

recommendation: Julia should actively participate in discussions

supporting information: how and why she should do this

Building trust

In order to build trust it is important to be open about your actions and interventions and to keep the commitments made to the group (Cohen 1988, p. 273). Julia has to try and get the group to trust her. Katzenbach and Smith (1993, p. 214) have suggested that the more open, constructive, and supportive the members are, the more effectively they share useful information and insights as well as help to motivate one another. It seems that the executive group is not accustomed to open communication. If they were, Alex Chan would not have a problem taking part in the discussion and also he would not need to be sarcastic. It is only when the group follows the model of the Johari window where they share data openly with each other, giving and receiving feedback (arena quadrant) that they can start trusting each other. Usually secrecy hinders trust.

recommendation: Julia should build relationships of trust and encourage open communication

supporting information

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Being taken seriously in a male dominated environment

Research in Australia, USA and UK indicates that the executive culture remains an overwhelmingly male domain (Sinclair 1995, p. 299). This research shows that males are not used to having females in executive positions and might not be accustomed to listening to their opinions. "I want to be taken seriously at work", is a common plea of new employees, young employees, and female employees who work in a male-dominated environment (Tingley 1996, p. 100). Tingley (1996, p. 111) suggests that in this situation one should be brief, concise and specific, eliminating excessive words, details, disclaimers and apologies. It is evident from the above quote that females, young employees and new people have a problem with being taken seriously. Most people would encounter this problem sometime in their life. The important thing is to persist and not be negative. Power in organisations is the ability to make things happen (Kanter 1977). Julia should try to be concise in her communication to overcome barriers to the male domain. She should also be energetically and enthusiastically working on ideas to make things happen.

recommendation: Julia should be concise in her communications

the writer identifies management theories, issues, or arguments, then relates them to the case situation

Conflict resolution and negotiation

Julia should develop her skills in handling conflict, especially intergroup conflict. She should expect conflict to occur because she is trying to create change. She needs to negotiate the changes with them. Her aim should be to have a win-win outcome rather than a win-lose because her relationship to the team is too valuable to approach it any other way. Commitment is likely if the request is persuasive and shares the leader's task goals (Bartol et al. 1995, p. 451). The other team members would have to be won over to Julia's goals before commitment is likely. She needs to look at researching the problem, decide on key issues relevant to the conflict and identify options and resources relevant to the conflict and its resolution. In order to negotiate changes with the group, she has to identify what is working for and against her; obtain key information about the other members in her group; strike the right balance in outcomes for herself and others.

recommendation: Julia should develop negotiating and conflict resolution skills

supporting argument: how she should do this

Team building

Individualism of senior people conspire against teams at the top. Specialisation may cause individuals to be more concerned with their own work unit and have little appreciation of others' needs and communication (Bartol et al. 1995, p. 506). It is therefore important for executives to work harder at identifying a common purpose. Julia needs to improve how the group functions as a team. She should be aware of group norms. She should find out which norms are task related and which norms are counter-productive. These questions can give valuable insights into the group and how to behave within it.

recommendation: Julia needs to improve how the group functions as a team

Where groups become very cohesive, there is a danger that they become victims of their own closeness (Janis 1972). Julia has to keep in mind that groupthink could be a problem when there is too much cohesiveness. It might be useful for Julia to suggest someone to chair the meetings. Preferably an objective person who can ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak, who can stop some interruptions, manage time and prevent one or two people from 'hogging' the time.

sentence structure: the shaded sentence does not have a main clause. It could be written as This should be an objective person …

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Conclusion

This essay offered some solutions to the problems Julia is facing working in a group. The important thing is that outcomes are mostly superior to that of individuals. It is therefore important to have a team that is working together to accomplish a common purpose. It is also important for a team to have a good mix of skills. There needs to be an environment of learning and commitment. It is important for individuals in a team to be individually accountable as well as mutually accountable. It is important for members in a team also to be able to communicate openly with each other. Although this essay addressed mainly the problems Julia was facing, there is need for the other members of the executive group to work together and build characteristics of a team.

the suggested solutions to Julia's problems would benefit both individual and group

writer's reflection: broader application of solutions is relevant

References

Bartol, KM, Tein, M & Matthews, C 1995, *Management: a Pacific rim focus* 1st edn, McGraw-Hill, Sydney

Cohen, WA 1988, *The practice of marketing management: Analysis, planning, and implementation*, Collier Macmillan, New York

Dunford, R 1992, *Organisational behaviour: an organisational analysis perspective*, Addison-Wesley, Sydney

Janis, IL 1972, *Victims of groupthink: A psychological study of foreign-policy decisions and fiascoes*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston

Jeffries, JR, Bates, JD 1983, *The executive's guide to meetings, conferences, and audiovisual presentations*, McGraw-Hill, New York

Kanter, RM 1977, *Men and women of the corporation*, Basic Books, New York

Sinclair, A 1995, 'Sex and the MBA', *Organization*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 295-317

Tingley, JC 1996, *Say what you mean get what you want: A businessperson's guide to direct communication*, AMACOM, New York

Whetten, D & Cameron, K 1995, *Developing Management Skills*, Pearson, New York

Reference list should always start on a new page and use hanging indents (as here). Justification of text is not necessary.

LANGUAGE FEATURES

- Headings should be in the same grammatical form throughout
- Headings with verbs are generally less effective in formal writing than headings of noun groups (eg 'Being taken seriously at work vs professional acceptance; resolving conflict vs conflict resolution)
- Persuasion: strong obligation constructed through modal verbs ('has to'; 'have got to come to terms', 'should').

NOTES

The essay has identified reasons for Julia's difficulties and offered solutions, but the writer has not systematically linked the solutions to the identified problems. The essay could have clearer links between each reason and solution. The conclusion here could also be more succinct – eg just briefly stating the solutions: 'The problems Julia is facing would be suitably addressed by open communication, assertiveness …'.

The reference list has not been included here, but you must include a reference list or bibliography in all your assignments. Also, this essay is of course only one possible response to the question.

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