

Summary in English

Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to describe the research process and the results of the Industrial PhD project “Developmental episodes in management teams”. The aim of the project was through an explorative comparative case study to study the episodes whereby management teams begin new patterns of interaction, that enable them to more successfully accomplish their goals. The research questions were : 1) Are “developmental episodes in management teams” an identifiable phenomenon? 2) How does the generic progression through developmental episodes in management teams take place? 3) Which variations of developmental episodes are the most salient?

Methods

The project had access to follow the training programs of two management teams as conducted by DevelopmentConsultants Ltd. Each training program consisted of 6 seminar days that were observed and videotaped. Following each seminar day, each participant was interviewed regarding whether they had observed any new patterns of interaction within the teams, and how these episodes that led up to these pattern changes could be explained. If several participants reported episodes within the same time frame, they were combined to one episode. At the end of the training programs, each participant was asked to evaluate how significant each reported episode had been for the team’s ability to attain each of their specified training outcomes. The data material was organized around each of the 54 reported developmental episodes so that each case study contained field notes, a video, interview(s), and participants’ evaluations of significance.

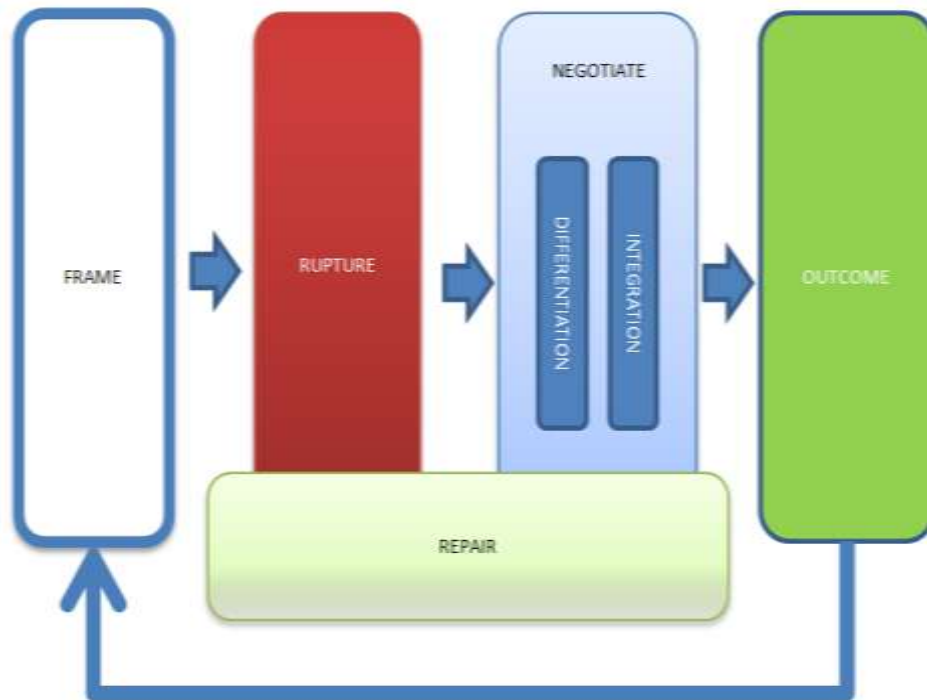
The data analysis consisted of two parts. The first part described and interpreted each case from a “management”, a “psychodynamic”, and a “social constructionist” perspective. Three competing hypotheses were created for each research question from these analyses. The second part of the data analysis produced visual cross-case displays for each research question, showing significant characteristics from each case. The significant characteristics were selected based on what would help evaluate the competing hypotheses against each other. Through the production and analysis of the displays, the hypotheses were adjusted to give the best possible account of salient patterns in the data. Together these hypotheses have formed the first tentative theory on developmental episodes.

Findings

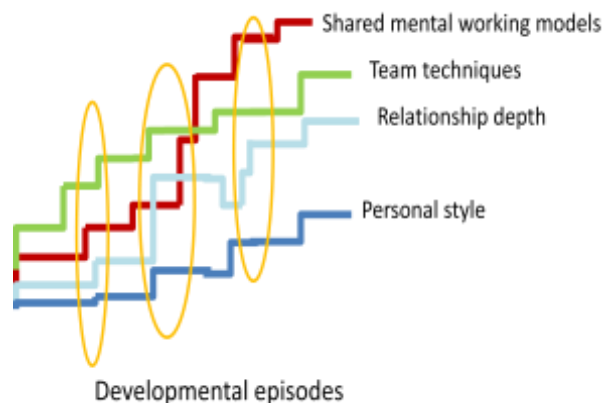
The research found that developmental episodes can be identified in the training of management teams. Half of the reported episodes were identified by more than one participant, and there was a high consistency in the participants’ evaluations of the significance of episodes.

A sequence of 4 phases could be identified throughout the 54 developmental episodes . In the first phase, the teams and consultants set a framework for the training that increased the pressure on participants to change habitual patterns, while lowering the interpersonal risk in doing so. In the second phase, one or more of the participants initiated an action that disrupted the rest of the team’s interaction patterns. This pattern rupture was either ignored, suppressed or accepted by the team. If it was accepted, the third phase commenced at the point where the new pattern of interaction was negotiated. Typically, the team’s members first differentiated their opinions or actions so that multiple competing patterns were in play

before the tension reached a level that made the members integrate their opinions or actions into a new stable pattern of interaction. In the fourth phase, the team members were consistently observed to be repairing damaged relationships, the status of individual team members that had taken high risk, and/or the team's shared motivation. This fourth phase sometimes ran parallel to the pattern disruption phase and the negotiation phase.



The research also found several salient variations of developmental episodes in management teams. The most salient was the variation between what types of interaction patterns were broken. The research identified “change of personal style”, “change of team techniques”, “change of relationship depth” and “change of shared mental working models”. These four types of interaction patterns are regularly disrupted, improved and stabilized as the management teams develop. This view of team development through episodic change challenges existing theories that claim dynamics in team development to be gradual, stepwise or punctuated (Gersick, 1988; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977).



Episodes were also found to vary according to how compressed in time the episodes were, how controversial the issue was, and whether the pattern disruption was made by one person or by the whole group together. The themes that dominated the work of the management teams as they successfully created new interaction patterns were: Goal setting, celebration of success, facilitation, frankness and , role distribution, reflection and dialogue, as well as dealing with conflicts.

Methodological limitations and implications

This research project is the first exploratory case study of management team development of its kind in the field. It has used large amounts of ethnographic interpretative methods to process the complex field observations and video into a cohesive theory and description of the developmental episodes in management teams. The 54 cases were collected from only two management teams, which were both trained under similar programs. In spite of a great deal of reflection and transparency in the analysis, the resulting concepts, descriptions and hypotheses must be seen as a preliminary conceptualization that requires similar studies and further research to refine the theory, concepts and the domain of applicability. The method of using comparative case studies of successful episodes shows much promise for future studies using multiple sources of field data to describe and generate theory on otherwise evasive dynamic organizational phenomena.

Implications for practice

The theory on developmental episodes in management teams that this study has generated adds to existing knowledge by presenting an empirically based description of the process behind developing the critical “process factors” in teamwork. The framework with the four phases enables practitioners to better facilitate the solution to the greatest challenges that face management teams (deficient teamwork skills, rivalries, group thinking, and fragmentation (Hambrick, 1995)) through adapting the design of more disruption tolerant frames than production meetings and through supported differentiation, integration and repair. Furthermore, the episodes that managers in this study report as enabling them to accomplish their goals, suggest that helping each other and celebrating success are important additions to the known process factors of goal setting, facilitation, managing disagreements and reflection (Bang, 2008). They also suggest that tasks such as helping each other with individual challenges, shared sensemaking, and relationship building are tasks that are just as important to management teams’ success as traditional problem solving and decision making.

Originality/ contribution

The research project is unique in its ambition to generate practice oriented theory on complex organizational phenomena through transparent, comparative case studies from multiple rich data sources. It contributes an often requested type of study that observe interpersonal temporal dynamics in the field and uses transparent, reflective, and systematic methods to generate concepts, descriptions and conclusions equally valuable to theory and practice.

Keywords

Developmental episodes, pattern breaking, management teams, executive teams, leadership teams, case study, practice research, team training, team development, small groups, management, management training, consulting.