

IGNATIAN TEAMWORK

An Emergent Framework

from the Instructions for the Team at Trent

Précis: The author analyses Master Ignatius' instruction to the Companions at Trent. He finds in it a framework to guide them as a team. Master Ignatius sets the goal and indicates the means to reach it. He goes further and outlines a group process. He shows how each one should contribute to the process and grow within it. The author shows how these are the elements urged by the practice of Organization Development.

I have long been convinced that if Ignatius were alive today, he would recognise and support many of the approaches to organisational renewal known as organisation development.¹ Organisation development is a

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facilitative approach to development: it functions by helping members of organisations manage their own change by reflecting on their own experience and coming to their own judgement of what needs to change and how to go about it. It puts considerable emphasis on the work of teams and groups within the development of an organisation, since teams and groups have greater leverage in affecting change in organisations than have individuals.

If we search the writings of Ignatius to find guidelines as to how teams and groups can best work according to his charism, can we find any? This article gives an affirmative answer and presents Ignatius' letter to the early Companions attending the Council of Trent, written in early 1546, as

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evidence.² The article presents the text of Ignatius' letter and extrapolates an emergent framework, which it then explores in the context of contemporary team and group theory and practice.

Instructions for the Team at Trent³

Master Ignatius wrote these instructions to James Lainez, Alphonso Salmerón, and Pierre Favre, who were later joined by Claude Le Jay and Peter Canisius. The Instructions are in three parts. "On Social Relations" deals with how to behave at the Council sessions. "On Helping Others" addresses ministries the companions are to engage in among the people of the town. And "On Looking After Ourselves" provides guidelines on the maintenance of the group. In the Instruction, several key elements of a framework for Ignatian teamwork may be found.

*F*irst element. The first element is purpose and end. Ignatius sets out the overall purpose.

Our main aim (to God's greater glory) during this undertaking at Trent is to put into practice (as a group that lives together in one appropriate place) preaching, confessions and readings, teaching children, giving good example, visiting the poor in hospitals, exhorting those around us, each of us according to the different talents he may happen to have, urging on as many as possible to greater piety and prayer. All this is undertaken so that they and we may implore God Our Lord that His Divine Majesty kindly infuse His divine spirit into all those due to discuss the questions proper to such a lofty gathering, in order that the Holy Spirit may descend with greater abundance of gifts and graces on this Council. [2.1]

*S*econd element. Ignatius is very clear on how all this is to be done. Hence, the second element pertains to means of achieving the purpose or end. Ignatius was always very clear about this distinction – between purpose and means – and he used it constantly. While attending sessions of the Council, the Jesuit group is to have good social relations with those they are in contact.

Anyone of ours should be slow to speak and show consideration and sympathy, especially in dealing with doctrinal definitions. [1.2]

Along with his reticence, he should rely on a readiness to listen, keeping quiet so as to sense and appreciate the positions, emotions and desires of those speaking. [1.3]

He should admit both sides of the question and not appear self-opinionated, trying to avoid leaving either party discontented. [1.4]

Unless the questions raised are of great moment, he should refrain from quoting authors, especially major ones; instead he should be friendly to all and avoid passionate support for one side or other. [1.5]

*When questions raised to invoke points of right that cannot or should not be passed over, he is to give his point of view as calmly and unpretentiously as possible, adding as a rider *salvo meliori iudicio* [unless someone knows better]. [1.6]*

Finally, when subjects turn on experiential or infused knowledge, if one wants to take part, it will be a great help to forget completely one's own preoccupations and lack of time, i.e. my own convenience, and adapt myself to the convenience and requirements of the person I want to deal with, so that I can urge them on to God's greater glory. [1.7]

In the middle part, "On Helping Others", Ignatius provides clear guidelines on *means*: preaching, confessions and readings, teaching children, giving good example, visiting the poor in hospitals, exhorting, urging on as many as possible to greater piety and prayer. About each of these, Ignatius provides more specific instructions.

In their preaching they should not refer to points of conflict between Protestants and Catholics, but simply exhort all to upright conduct and to ecclesiastical practice, urging everyone to full self-knowledge and to greater knowledge and love of their Creator and Lord. At the end of each

sermon they should lead prayers for the Council. [2.2]

They should do the same with reading as with sermons, trying their best to influence people with great love of their Creator and Lord as they explain the meaning of what is read; similarly they should lead their hearers to pray for the Council. [2.3]

In hearing confessions, they should remember to repeat to their penitents what they are saying in public, and in all confessions they should give as a penance some prayers for this intention. [2.4]

When giving the Exercises or other conferences, they should bear in mind what they are saying in public. [2.5]

They should spend some time, as is convenient, in the elementary teaching of youngsters, depending on the means and disposition of all involved, and with more or less explanation according to the capacity of the pupils. [2.6]

Let them visit almshouses once or twice a day, at times that are convenient to the patients' health, hearing confessions and consoling the poor, if possible taking them something and urging them to the sort of prayer mentioned above for confessions. [2.7]

When they are urging people in their dealings with them to go to confession and communion, to say mass frequently, to undertake the Spiritual Exercises and other good works, they should be urging them to pray for the Council. [2.8.]

It was said that there are advantages in being slow to speak and measured in one's statements when doctrinal definitions are involved. The opposite is true when one is urging people to look to their spiritual progress. Then one should be eloquent and ready to talk, full of sympathy and affection. [2.9]

Third element. In any cooperative venture, attention has to be given to the maintenance of the team, itself, keeping its members together

in order to perform the tasks assigned to it.⁴ Ignatius is aware of this. In the third part of the Instruction, he lays out very clear process instructions as to how the group is maintain the quality of its group life. Hence the third element of a framework for Ignatian teamwork is the maintenance of the life of the group.

We should set an hour aside every evening for all us to inform one another what has been done during the day and what should be done on the following day. [3.1]

We will take votes or use some other way to get agreement on what is past and what is still to come. [3.2.]

Each morning we should look to what we intend for that day, then make an examen of conscience twice during the day. [3.5]

This time-table is to be put into effect five days after our arrival in Trent. Amen. [3.6]

Fourth element. Ignatius also prescribes some activities to help the individual members of the group, and this is the fourth element in a framework of Ignatian teamwork: the growth of the individual member of the group.

One night one can ask the others to point out any faults they may have noticed, and the person criticised should not reply unless he is asked to explain why he did what was found wrong. [3.3]

Another night another will do the same, and so in turn, so that all can help one another to grow in charity and good influence all around. [3.4]

An Emergent Ignatian Framework

From the Instruction, several key elements of a framework for Ignatian teamwork may be gleaned (Figure 1). The first element is clearly that

of clarity of purpose and end. The second element is selecting the means to achieve that end. The third element is group process which focuses on how the group achieves its tasks and fosters its group life. The fourth element is the growth of the individual.

For teams of Jesuits or teams wishing to work in an Ignatian manner, the four elements of, i) purpose or end, ii) means, iii) group process, and iv) the growth of the individual provide a useful framework.

Purpose/End



Means



Maintaining the Life of the Group



Helping the Growth of the Individual

Figure 1. Ignatian Teamwork

Under *purpose or end*, the team members would consider the question, What do we want? What do we want to bring about, in the long, medium, and short terms? What goals do we set?

Under *means*, the team members would consider, How do we achieve our purpose or end? Who is going to do what? Who is responsible for what? By when is it to be done? How will it be done?

Under *group process*, the question is, How do we proceed? How we will structure our meetings and listen to each other?⁵ How will we structure listening to the Holy Spirit? How will we engage in apostolic discernment in common?

Finally, under the *individual's growth*: How do we build on the experiences and gifts of the team's members? How do we maintain a relationship of "friends in the Lord"? How do we work in such a way that "all can help one another to grow in charity and good influence all around"? [3.4] These elements have a hierarchical significance.⁶ *Purpose or end* comes first. These define why the group is formed and what its primary task and priorities are. Without these there is unclarity, confusion, and probably conflict about why the group exists and what it is supposed to do. When there is some degree of clarity and agreement about what the purpose or end is, then the next task is determine *the means* by allocating the work and how it is to be performed. Of course, if there is a lack of clarity about the purpose or end, then selecting the means will be problematic.

As the group sets about its work, issues of how the group manages

itself and its work become pertinent. So the group needs to sort out how often to meet, what kind of meetings to have, what communication is required among its members, how decisions are to be made, how disagreements and conflicts will be handled, and what is expected of the leader. These are *team process* issues and refer to how the team goes about its collective task. Finally, there are the needs of the *individual members* and the interpersonal relationships between them.

Different *tasks* make different process and relational demands on teams. For example, in industry some teams need to meet daily; others, weekly or less often. The determining factor in deciding how often to meet is what the purpose or end demands. In a similar vein, the *tasks* of some teams put the personal safety of team members in the hands of their fellows. Such shared responsibility creates a particular bond among team members which teams that do not have such responsibility, do not have.

I have worked with teams whose members have told me that they need help because they have “personality conflicts” in the team. In some instances that may well be the case. It is less often the case than it is made out to be. What is more often the case is that the purpose or end is unclear and group members do not know that there are different perceptions and points of view as to what the group should be doing. In such a case, it is likely that each member is contributing out of his own sense of what the group’s purpose and end is, and they are all interpreting other members’ contributions as personality quirks, rather than understanding their situation as one of unclear purpose and end.

Alternatively, the supposed “personality conflict” may be a sign that meetings are not well organised and run, so that the team’s process is creating interpersonal tensions. Thus, it is important to view the work of teams in terms of the four hierarchically arranged elements – purpose or end, means, team process, and the individual members.

Four Perspectives on the Framework

The four elements of teamwork can be viewed from several different perspectives, which I could call leaders, members, outcomes, and

consultants.⁷

Leaders or superiors typically have one perspective. About purpose or end, they consider how much they define the purpose and how much they invite the members to do so. Are priorities a given or are they decided by the group? What are the leaders' hoped-for outcomes? About means, they consider who sets the means. How are all the necessary tasks to be allocated? What roles are required? Under team process they consider how the group is working. How effective is it? What else is needed? Under individual, they are considering how each member contributes and can be helped to grow.

In the Instruction, Ignatius wrote from this perspective; he clearly established the "main aim", set the means to be followed, and prescribed how the group was to work.

Members typically have a different perspective from that of group leaders. Under purpose or end, they are typically asking, Do I understand what I am here for? Under means, they ask, Do I know what is expected of me? Under group process, they consider the group's atmosphere and way of working and how they like or do not like being a member of the group. Under individual, they are aware of the challenges to their own way of thinking and working.

Then, *outcomes* suggest a third perspective. What is important, after all, are the outcomes of the group's work. As to the purpose or end, are the outcomes significant and what is desired? Do the means selected and implemented enable those purposes be achieved? Is the group's way of being and working enabling the ends to be reached? Are the individual members contributing to the outcomes?

A consultant or facilitator suggests a fourth perspective. Many groups and teams utilise the services of a process consultant and or facilitator from time to time to help them improve their effectiveness or way of working.⁸ Those engaged by groups as process consultants or facilitators consider purpose or end in terms of clarity and agreement. Does this group know what its purposes are? Do the members agree on purpose or end? How do they select and implement the means? Does the group work well? Is it in consolation? How do the members behave in the meetings?

Concluding Remarks

In his Instruction to the group at Trent, Ignatius reminded the members of their “main aim”. He the instructed them how to enact that aim and how to keep the group spirit alive, suggesting ways to share their experiences and help one another grow.

From this Instruction, we can extrapolate an Ignatian framework of teamwork which begins with purpose or end, then moves to means to achieve that end, and then focuses on the dynamics of the team and the support of the individuals to keep the group together to work towards the attainment of the purpose.

Ignatius anticipated contemporary elements of team and group dynamics and provides a valuable framework for those working in an Ignatian mode to both work in tune with Ignatian spirituality and benefit from what contemporary research on groups and teams has taught us.

Notes

¹. *Good Instruments: Ignatian Spirituality, Organisation Development and the Renewal of Ministries*, David Coghlan, Rome: Secretariatus Spiritualitatis Ignatianae, 1999.

². The idea for this article comes from the article by Franz Meures, “Jesuit Corporate Identity,” in *Review of Ignatian Spirituality*, 1998, #89, p.35, fn 21. I thank Fr Meures for permission to adopt his idea and for his support in developing it.

³. *Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings*, Trans. Joseph A. Munitz & Philip Endean, Penguin, London, 1996, pp. 164-167.

⁴. “Functional Role of Group Members”, K. Benne, & P. Sheats, *Journal of Social Issues*, 1948, 4, 41-49.

⁵. *Creating Effective Teams*, Susan A. Wheelan, Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA. 1999.

⁶. Optimizing Team Building Efforts, Richard Beckhard, *Journal of Contemporary Business*, 1972, pp. 23-27, 30-32

⁷. Beckhard, op cit.

⁸. Coghlan, op cit.