

# Evaluation of Leadership Teamwork Interventions at DTE Energy—Fermi 2 Nuclear Power Station

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Commercial nuclear power site leadership teams face daunting challenges to keep their operating units running safely and reliably throughout the entire fuel cycle. Our experience and research on nuclear senior leadership teams tells us that there are steps teams can take to improve the functioning of the team and its ability to lead the station to perform. In partnership with internal organizational development and human resources at DTE Energy, Strategic Talent Solutions (STS) conducted a series of team assessments and interventions that included a review of the effectiveness of the work. Results showed that the systematic approach to team building had a significant positive impact on the functioning of the senior team.

## DTE Energy—Fermi Unit 2 Performance

DTE Energy, based in Detroit, has a single nuclear generating facility—Fermi Unit 2— outside Monroe, Michigan. Fermi 2's generation capacity, industrial safety record, and other performance indicators had started to show decline in 2006-2007 after a few years of good performance. In 2007 DTE named a new Chief Nuclear Officer, Jack Davis, and Site Vice President, Joe Plona, who asked STS to help them turn around station performance by addressing organizational concerns, starting with the senior leadership team (SLT).

Although team theory and interventions are enjoyed in the popular business press (e.g., *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, 2002 by Lencioni; *The Wisdom of Teams*, 1993 by Katzenbach and Smith), most leaders are reluctant to invest time and money on team development in a systematic way. The senior leadership team effectiveness work at Fermi was part of a larger organizational change effort to make significant and sustained behavioral changes and performance improvements. The analysis of and interventions with the site senior leadership team were important first steps in this process. (Additional information on the larger program is available from the authors).

## Operational Senior Team Assessment

The Fermi team assessment included all the key managers and directors (15 people) from various departments who are responsible for the daily operation of the plant, as well as, together have some accountability for addressing the longer term concerns of the station (e.g., equipment reliability).

The assessment looked at critical aspects of team functioning, such as horizontal alignment and processes and structure that support teamwork. We used semi-structured interviews, team observations and a team survey to collect information. The STS Operational Senior Team Assessment areas are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1. STS Operational Team Assessment**

| <b>Area</b>                                | <b>Description</b>   |
|--|--|
| Horizontal Alignment                       | Degree and quality of cross-functional coordination and cooperation; SLT members communicate proactively; they work together to get results daily                            |
| Vision, Mission & Priorities               | SLT members are in agreement on station vision, mission, priorities and how to achieve station goals   |
| Expectations—Roles & Responsibilities      | Expectations regarding roles and responsibilities (RR) are clear and understood; SLT members are consistent in their execution of RR; expectations include teamwork behavior |
| Processes, Structure that Support Teamwork | Meetings, schedules, and shared accountabilities are structured and executed to foster cross-functional coordination and challenge   |
| Standards                                  | SLT members share a pursuit for higher standards of excellence, measure gaps to excellence and continually strive to improve   |
| Urgency                                    | SLT members show a common, appropriate level of urgency to address issues and obtain safe results  |
| Accountability                             | SLT members are consistent in holding organizations accountable; performance issues are addressed in a timely manner by the team   |
| Workforce Engagement                       | SLT members are consistent in their efforts to involve employees in improvements   |

The survey questionnaire asked team members to rate themselves and the SLT on eight aspects of teamwork, such as communication, timely assistance and working together to achieve site-wide goals. Participants also rank ordered each of the departments on cross-functional teamwork (from best to worst).

### Senior Team Assessment Results

The team assessment revealed a number of underlying issues that contributed to the gaps in teamwork. Senior managers were not aligned on expectations, standards and accountability and did not respond consistently to performance problems. Instead, they were hunkered down, reluctant to jump in and help one another. They did not drive improvements across the station in a coordinated manner. Moreover, the current structures and processes did not adequately support ongoing teamwork.

The department rankings on the team survey revealed some trends about specific departments that were used in facilitated team sessions later. The ratings on team behaviors showed that the following were the most problematic cross-functional team issues:

- . Timely sharing of information across departments
- . Helping other departments
- . Getting feedback on being a poor cross-functional team player

## Team Interventions

After reviewing the results of the team assessment, STS and Fermi OD worked closely with line leadership on a series of interventions. Teamwork sessions were designed to build alignment on standards, accountability and on how they were going to work together better. Each session had a written agenda with objectives that were discussed in advance with top leaders. The team sessions progressed from smaller to larger circles of senior leadership, starting with small groups of top leaders while latter sessions included the entire group of senior managers.

### Team-Building Session Example

The first full team session included the top 16 managers from various departments. The objectives of the session were to clarify expectations regarding teamwork behavior, to identify gaps in cross-functional team behavior, and to build agreement and commitment on improving teamwork. Senior leaders made initial remarks, tying the team development work with site vision and improvement plans. The core of the team activities in this session involved going through the results of the teamwork survey.

Seeing the results of the forced ranking on team behavior stimulated earnest and challenging discussion of why groups were ranked low or high. Team members were struck by the impact of their own actions and how their peers saw their behavior. Subsequently, the team reviewed the results of the ratings on team behavior and discussed which items were more crucial. In sum, this session was seen as pivotal in aligning senior managers on team behavior and in obtaining commitment to one another to improve cross-functional cooperation.

## Organizational Changes

To provide ongoing support for teamwork and alignment efforts and create a forum for addressing issues, the following organizational adaptations were made:

- Weekly management alignment meetings were held with the senior team to keep team initiatives and the expected results in front of people and to hold members accountable for behavior change.
- Organizational change and teamwork behavior initiatives were integrated into the site business plan; action plans were created and progress was reviewed regularly by the leadership team.
- Training was conducted to reinforce skills related to communication and mutual accountability.

## Effectiveness Review

In 2009, the team and the station had made noticeable progress. The team reported having a shared vision and shared expectations for performance. The site had improved operational performance, including greater capacity factor and a better industrial safety record. The effectiveness review was conducted to validate organizational improvements as well as to identify new areas that needed attention. The team survey that was taken in 2007 was re-

administered and was accompanied by the STS Team Audit, a 36-item questionnaire assessing team alignment, capability, cohesion and communication.

Team members' perceptions of cross-functional teamwork were much more positive in the 2009 survey (see Figure 1). Most improvement was seen in:

- . When help is needed across departments, getting it
- . Departments sharing information and communicating in a timely manner
- . Clear expectations for cross-functional teamwork
- . People getting feedback when they are being a poor team player

The STS team audit showed strong alignment and capability across the team. Team members reported that they are clear on the strategy, understand what they are accountable for delivering, they are supportive of the team's goals and are focused on getting results. The area of cohesion was the lowest rated area, especially collegiality and support. Follow-up team sessions were held focusing on cohesion, in order to continue to build the resilience of the SLT.

## **Conclusions**

Fermi made good use of the team assessment and intervention work. Getting alignment from the top and expanding team sessions methodically helped obtain results in subsequent team sessions. Rigorous follow-up on recommended actions was critical as the site made the oversight of team behavior part of its ongoing processes. The effectiveness review is a useful tool to validate improvements, highlight new areas for growth, as well as to ensure that team development resources are used wisely.

**Figure 1. Fermi Cross-Functional Team Effectiveness 2007 vs. 2009**

Respondents were asked to rate the extent to which the following statements were true for the team (1 = not true and 5 = very true).

