

Leadership

Applied Synergy is Order from Chaos

by AJ Powell 0 Comments 7 min read

Written by [AJ Powell](#)

Leadership shines best when order comes from chaos.

What does this statement mean? Well, it certainly is not suggesting that leadership is not present in situations where harmony already exists, but instead, suggests that harmony exists due to the presence of synergy.

In the effort to achieve success in a world where increasing amounts of effort and information are needed to foster that success, reliance on teamwork and collaborative efforts have created leadership challenges across grander scales. Yet, teamwork is not always easy, and team members do not necessarily always get along. However, despite the fact that internal disagreement may exist, successful teams are those that are able to employ their best assets towards achieving the end result. Knowing that, we should ask ourselves: What exactly is it about these dynamic teams that foster consistent success? The answer very well could lie in cultural synergy.

Moran, Harris and Moran (2011) state that Synergy is “a cooperative or combined action, and occurs when diverse or disparate individuals or groups collaborate for a common cause” (p. 233). In essence, synergy is the byproduct of effective teamwork derived from diverse sources. Now, we all recognize what diversity

brings to the table... new ideas, new perspectives, new strengths and abilities, etc. Along with that, diverse teams are able to use their collective strengths to overcome their collective weaknesses, which in turn gives them an advantage. But this advantage is only useful to the team that is effective at employing those strengths, and our assessment here so far assumes the success of the team is based on the proposition that the team gets along well together. In such a case, most would be led to believe that the team's success is derived from their ability to simply get along. Yet, this perspective would give the impression that teams who did not get along well would not be successful. And while there certainly is no argument to the evidence that proves internal conflict within a team can and will create disaster, there is also evidence to show that teams filled with personality clashes can also perform just as well. So therefore, we must ask ourselves, what is that success truly tied to? If it isn't harmony and it isn't chaos, what is it?

It must be Synergy. What makes teams so effective is a very well-defined, shared common goal that the collective effort strives for. In order to reach that goal, the team uses its diverse nature to the fullest, employing its strengths towards the collective effort, while setting aside those things that do not apply. While each individual may have weaknesses, the collective drive of the team is able to overcome those individual weaknesses, creating a shared advantage and an exponential increase in total capability. However, teamwork is not all smiles and kind words; it's hard work, and very often has an intensively steep learning curve. (p. 244) Successful teams are not necessarily those who get along well, but rather those filled with members who truly want to be a part of that team. They want to be a part of that culture; they take the initiative to find ways to fit in, to compliment their strengths in an integrated way with the other team members. Essentially, they build upon and integrate with the common ground, allowing the team to transcend their differences and form multifaceted strategic alliances and partnerships. (p. 233). This is Applied Synergy, Synergy in Action; and here is where organizational – and indeed, global – leaders shine.



Just because you happen to be a part of a team in no way means that you will get along with everyone on the team.

To understand this, let's look at two (one small-scale, and one large-scale) examples.

On a small-scale, U.S. Army MEDEVAC flight crews usually consist of a team of four members who operate an aircraft to perform Air Ambulance, Air Evac, and Personnel Recovery missions. They act as force multipliers for theater commanders, and in-theater assets that increase the collective projection of force through the capabilities MEDEVAC crews not only employ but also merely represent to the boots on the ground. These crews consist of very highly qualified, highly dedicated individuals – from all walks of life – who are employed to a singular collective effort, and there is nothing to suggest that they all “get along” or even simply agree with one another. But they are able to transcend their individual differences in favor of the professional desire to accomplish the mission at all costs. This allows them to separate their “personal” from the “professional” and thus allows for synergistic effects to occur.

On a grander scale, entire nations within the NATO/OTAN Alliance do not necessarily get along well either. They all have their own wants and desires, their own needs and agendas... but NATO/OTAN itself is a strategic alliance where member states have agreed to a collective effort and a shared common goal. This can be seen in the alliance's very charter, as Article 5 of the accord states that members have each agreed to

support the efforts of other states in the application of defense and military affairs. If one nation employs military assets to provide for defense, other nations are obligated to assist with that effort. We have seen this in action over the last decade with the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. While not all nations within the NATO/OTAN alliance agree on all things, they do agree on the provision of a collective effort to provide for regional stability and to rid the world of evils and threats to global society.

As leaders, it is our job to find ways to allow synergy to exist. We cannot assume that our teams will always get along. After all, conflict is a simple fact of life. We all have differences, and those differences will naturally create friction between individuals. It is therefore our job to manage that conflict in a way that promotes synergy. (p. 236) Essentially, we are responsible for finding ways to direct the focus of our teams strengths towards a common goal, while managing their weaknesses at the same time. What we should always seek to do is communicate and educate our teams to provide them with a shared understanding of their purpose, while providing them with direction, and motivation. Any person can lead a team who gets along well together simply because everyone's personalities are complimentary, but leaders are truly remarkable when faced with challenges. This is because the pursuit of leadership itself is a never-ending motivated effort to grow, and Leadership therefore shines best when faced with adversity. As such, innovative and effective leaders will create a strong team culture, foster and breed a social foundation based on a common cause, and direct strengths from diverse sources...

...Effectively creating order from chaos.

Sound Off!

Ask yourself, have you ever been a member of a team that was in a constant state of chaos? A team where its members were always at odds? If you were a member of the team, in what ways were you able to work with you peers? If you were in a leadership position, how were you able to get the team to function despite their differences? If you've never been in a situation like this before, what do you think you would do?

Let us know **YOUR** thoughts in the **Comments Below**. For those of you who have been in a team atmosphere like the one described above, share your thoughts on what types of leadership actions helped and what didn't. For those of you who have never experienced a team atmosphere like the one described above, read through the comments from your peers here, and start a reply conversation. Together, everyone learns more, and that's the point of our engagement.

References:

Moran, R. T., Harris, P. R., & Moran, S. V. (2011). *Managing cultural differences: Global leadership strategies for cross-cultural business success* (8th ed.). Oxford: Routledge.

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About the author



AJ Powell

AJ is a retired U.S. Army NCO who served in both the U.S. Navy and U.S. Army. He is a combat veteran, and has participated in contingency operations around the world. AJ is the Owner of Veteran Leadership Solutions, the Founder and Editor in Chief of The Warfighter Journal, and is a published Sociological Analyst, Researcher, Guest Lecturer, and Public Speaker. He is a graduate of Pennsylvania State University with a focus on Sociology and a science degree in Organizational Leadership, and is published in the field of sociology. AJ is an inductive analyst; public figure; researcher/writer; aviator; a certified advanced operational diver; professional instructor, trainer, mentor, and adviser; snowboarder; motorcycle rider; world traveler; he enjoys long distance endurance events, and much more.