

## And when the team is a group?

*Written by Wanderley Silva (2009)*

Carlos Fontana was hired as a public servant as a Specialist in Public Policies and Management (EPPGG)<sup>1</sup>. He graduated and was excited to start his activities in Ministry XYZ, to which he had been allocated. Carlos holds a Law degree and a postgraduate degree in Public Law. He had worked in the private sector for eight years and was just starting his experience in the Federal Public Service. In the first week, Carlos was introduced to the group that he would work with, which was composed by:

- 1) **Ana Lúcia** - sectorial analyst with DAS<sup>2</sup> 2 - has worked in the public service for 12 years and in Ministry XYZ for 10 years;
- 2) **Cláudio Figueiredo** - hired by UNDP - has worked in Ministry XYZ for three years;
- 3) **Herbert Fields** - DAS 1, not affiliated with the public administration - has worked in Ministry XYZ for three years;
- 4) **Miguel Teixeira** - Outsourced employee - has worked in Ministry XYZ for one and a half years;
- 5) **Ricardo Pereira** - trainee pursuing a degree in Statistics - has worked in Ministry XYZ for one year;
- 6) **Andrea Correa** - trainee, pursuing a degree in Administration - has worked in Ministry XYZ for eight months;
- 7) **Paul Andrew** - Employee in a mid-level career, 29 years of public service, 20 in Ministry XYZ;

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<sup>1</sup> EPPGG are Seniors Civil Servants who work on Public Policy and Governmental Management.

<sup>2</sup> DAS (Direção e Assessoramento Superior) are positions of trust for special management and advice in the federal civil service. Servants in DAS positions come from either the civil service or the labor market and are selected through a discretionary process. In order to attract high level staff for junior and senior-level management and advisory positions, civil servants are granted financial supplements that are not part of their regular salary. Those who come from the labor market receive a salary that corresponds to the supplement granted for civil servants.

His superior, the senior executive secretary, said he was very happy to have a “manager” at Ministry XYZ and that Carlos would have a difficult task because the head of that sector (**Antônio Dias**, DAS 3) had been invited to another position outside the Ministry, and Ana Lúcia wanted to replace him. However, the secretary opted to bring a chief from outside the group and held high expectations regarding the work that Carlos could develop.

The executive secretary informed Carlos that the sector had problems in communication, with a strong presence of informal communication, but poor formal communication. Moreover, although it was not explicit, there was a visible power struggle between Ana Lúcia, the former chief Antônio Dias, and Cláudio Figueiredo.

The main function of the sector was to monitor and evaluate the activities and projects developed by Ministry XYZ on a national level. It was therefore necessary to contact other secretariats of state and municipalities, follow up projects, analyze annual reports, prepare reports describing the services provided by the Ministry XYZ and point suggestions for discussion in the Strategic Plan of the Agency.

However, the evaluation of the minister and his advisers was that the sector only compiled several reports into a single annual report. Whenever the minister needed data on the progress of Ministry projects, he and his advisers had to require specific research, because the data was never available.

Carlos Fontana accepted the challenge to manage that sector and try to turn the group into a team, increasing its effectiveness. During the first month, Carlos was able to observe the following characteristics of the group:

- technical heterogeneity;
- similar work hours;
- similar assignments and levels of responsibility (even considering the presence of interns and people with DAS);
- different wage levels and permanence is not guaranteed due to the different forms of access;
- general coordination (director level of the Ministry) is centralized, partly due to the absence of effective intermediate positions of leadership;
- little communication related to work among members, although social communication was good;
- some issues were treated with better quality than others within the sector.

Carlos Fontana realized that, although they all had the same work hours (even the interns worked eight hours per day), the technical heterogeneity hindered task delegation with equal distribution and also the switching of tasks among members, so as to avoid interruption of workflow in cases of regular absence from work. It was clear that the head needed to coordinate work performed

individually, because there were certain skills that were essential for the task and only a few members possessed them.

For example, only Hebert Campos (DAS 1, not affiliated with the public administration) and Ricardo Pereira (intern) were somewhat knowledgeable in statistics and knew how to operate the software of data analysis. On the other hand, the writing skills of the group were not that strong and tasks with more elaborate texts were normally exclusively given to Ana Lúcia (DAS 2 - 10 years in the Ministry XYZ).

These discrepancies in professional skills hindered the transformation of the result into a collective product and the personal valuation of the members. There was still uncertainty about the permanence of professionals, which generated feelings of instability. It was also necessary to consider that the different wage levels, as a result of different forms of access, meant that the expectations and commitment by members of that sector were different.

Finally, the atmosphere among colleagues was friendly, without major conflicts, but it was undeniable that there were different degrees of commitment to work and of the quality of the work done.

Carlos Fontana became interested in the theme team management and began to study it. He identified the group in the texts he read, noting that: it was a group (not a team), with eight members; people performed complementary activities; although there was a specific objective common to all members, this goal did not seem to be clear to all; there were interaction and interdependence relationships among members, with the predominance of social cohesion and weak cohesion per task; people identified themselves as belonging to the “team” and other members of the organization identified them as members of this team. Therefore, there were some characteristics that would assist in the development of a team and others that would hinder it.

Carlos took notes during his studies that generated four measures to increase the effectiveness of the work within that group:

- to increase stability for the permanence of members through permanent hiring;
- to strengthen social cohesion through the creation of mechanisms or a communication system among members;
- to create a reward system as a consequence of performance results;
- to adopt an information feedback mechanism in which all members would have access to all the information of the sector.

After the first 60 days in the sector, Carlos did not know “how”, but was convinced that he had to adopt the four measures described above. Then, he set up a meeting with his superiors to present his evaluation of the group and also his suggestions for the solution. However, before this meeting, he met with his managing colleagues, who decided to debate a little on the case of Carlos Fontana at Ministry XYZ.

### Questions for debate

Based on the case presented and your experience in the public service, you'll discuss six of the eight following questions. Each group will debate one and then present the result of the debate to the class.

- 1) What can be done to improve the effectiveness of this sector as regards to wage gaps and the permanence not guaranteed?
- 2) Are the notes made by Carlos Fontana consistent with the situation? Would you follow the same path? Which paths would you take?
- 3) What could Carlos do to try to turn this group into a team? Which is the most appropriate leadership style for this situation?
- 4) How should this team be structured? Who should occupy which position?
- 5) Based on what the executive secretary informed Carlos about the problems of communication in the team, what could he do as a manager to solve or lighten the situation?