

# THE IMPORTANCE OF TEAM BUILDING FOR THE SUCCESS OF A PROJECT

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**Abstract:**

*Project management is a carefully planned and organized effort to accomplish a specific (and usually) one-time effort, for example, construct a building or implement a new computer system. One of the most important steps of a project is to carefully choose the team. This is not an easy job to do, because it requires a lot of objectivity and you must keep in mind the goal of the project and not the sympathy for certain persons. It's good to remember that team building means a lot of team coordination, a lot of suggestions and indications to give and a lot of questions to be asked. And this is something that takes place starting with the beginning, when you choose the people, and ending with the reach of the goal, when you finally take a break and celebrate.*

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Project management is a carefully planned and organized effort to accomplish a specific (and usually) one-time effort, for example, construct a building or implement a new computer system. Project management includes developing a project plan, which includes defining project goals and objectives, specifying tasks or how goals will be achieved, what resources are needed, and associating budgets and timelines for completion. It also includes implementing the project plan, along with careful controls to stay on the "critical path", that is, to ensure the plan is being managed according to plan. Project management usually follows major phases (with various titles for these phases), including feasibility study, project planning, implementation, evaluation and support/maintenance. (Program planning is usually of a broader scope than project planning, but not always.)

One of the most important steps of a project is to carefully choose the team. This is not an easy job to do, because it requires a lot of objectivity and you must keep in mind the goal of the project and not the sympathy for certain persons. Before choosing the team you must think what kind of specialists you need exactly and this is the main thing you must consider when you choose the members: their specialty and your need for it.

The qualities needed for every project are patience, involvement, openness to suggestions and indications, pleasure and easiness for team working, etc.; but besides these there are also others to keep in mind and that regard strictly the type of project you're working on.

It's good to remember that team building means a lot of team coordination, a lot of suggestions and indications to give and a lot of questions to be asked. And this is something that takes place starting with the beginning, when you choose the people, and ending with the reach of the goal, when you finally take a break and celebrate.

Team building means talking, discussing, asking and answering, being ready for brainstorming or for working more than usual, listening and asking for suggestions, respecting and following the indications received, keeping the moral as high as possible and motivating the people when needed. All these are team works so, basically, team building doesn't regard only the project manager's tasks, but the whole team'.

Managers and supervisors frequently face such a dilemma—standards that should be met but aren't for what seems like no apparent reason.

Informal groups formulate an implicit code of ethics or an unspoken set of standards establishing acceptable behavior.

It is very important to analyze the **dynamics of informal groups**. Informal groups almost always arise if opportunities exist.

Often, these groups serve a counter organizational function, attempting to counteract the coercive tendencies in an organization. If management prescribes production norms that the group considers unfair, for instance, the group's recourse is to adopt less demanding norms and to use its ingenuity to discover ways in which it can sabotage management's imposed standards.

Informal groups have a powerful influence on the effectiveness of an organization, and can even subvert its formal goals. But the informal group's role is not limited to resistance. The impact of the informal group upon the larger formal group depends on the norms that the informal group sets. So the informal group can make the formal organization more effective, too.

**Leadership of informal work groups** is something that the manager have to learn. Informal groups possess certain characteristics that, if understood, can be used to advantage. While many of these characteristics are similar to those of formal organizations, others are unique. One attribute of informal groups is rotational leadership.

The informal leader emerges as the individual possessing qualities that the other members perceive as critical to the satisfaction of their specific needs at the moment; as the needs change so does the leader. Only rarely does a single individual possess all of the leadership characteristics needed to fill the various needs of the group.

**Supervisory strategies** is another point that a project manager have to think about.

The supervisor can use several strategies to affect the leadership and harness the power of informal groups. One quick and sure method of changing a group is to cause the leader to change one or more of his or her characteristics. Another is to replace the leader with another person.

One common ploy is to systematically rotate out of the group its leaders and its key members. Considering the rotational nature of leadership, a leader may emerge who has aims similar to the formal goals of the organization. There are problems with this approach, however. Besides the practical difficulties of this, this strategy is blunted by the fact that group norms often persist long after the leader has left the group.

A less Machiavellian approach is for the supervisor to be alert to leaders sympathetic to the supervisor's objectives and to use them toward the betterment of the formal group's effectiveness. Still another method is to attempt to 'co-opt' informal leaders by absorbing them into the leadership or the decision-making structure of the formal group. Co-opting the informal leader often serves as a means of averting threats to the stability of the formal organization.

Remember, though, a leader may lose favor with the group because of this association with management, and group members will most likely select another leader.

To build a **Communications network** is a must for the success of the project.

Knowing about informal group communication the supervisor can provide a strategically placed individual with information needed by the group. This not only enhances the stature of this individual perhaps elevating him or her to a leadership position but also provides an efficient means of distributing information.

Providing relevant information to the group will also help foster harmony between the supervisor and the informal group.

By winning the cooperation of informal group leaders the supervisor will most likely experience fewer grievances and better relationships.

### **Steps to Successful Team Building**

"We are going to build a team". Replace the word "team" with the word "house" - or any other noun that can be built and will take more than just a few minutes - and most sensible people will want to adopt a structured approach. The same goes for successful team building.

### **Planning**

Plans will be drawn up and approved. People will receive copies of the plan and efforts will be made to ensure everyone understands it. Progress will be monitored against the plan. Lessons will be learned along the way that will be used to improve the next phase. Anything less will lead at best to mediocrity and underachievement.

### **Team Building Shouldn't Be Ad Hoc**

Why is it that team building is so often treated in an ad hoc manner? You wouldn't take bricks and mortar out, show them a good time and expect them to rearrange themselves into something better just because they had a nice break. So why expect a group of people to do any better?

The only answer to that question with any merit is that bricks can't think and people can. Which sounds like management by abdication. Or perhaps management by trusting to luck. It certainly doesn't sound like a structured approach.

### **More Than Just Fun**

So if taking people off for some fun is not team building - what is it? Traditional away day options are team bonding exercises - and that is different. Take a group quad-biking, paint-balling etc and it will help bond the participants through a shared experience. You can even justify its use of some of the training budget if you like by claiming it has helped them develop as a team. Just don't believe it - or you'll be disappointed to discover that while the group is closer it is no more effective.

### **A Structured Process**

No - if you want to build a team rather than just bond the individuals closer, you need a structured process. You need to decide before you start what improvements you want and can realistically expect the team to achieve. Next you can decide how long it will take to achieve those results. Often, fun remains a key objective for such a session. If it is the only one - or is only combined with a desire to get the team to become closer - organising a team bonding session is an ideal solution. If, however, your expectations are set higher than that - then you need something more structured.

### **Key Characteristics of Team Building**

So what are the key characteristics of a genuine team building session? I suggest the following 7 steps will lead to team building success: Have definite session and longer-term goals and know how the session goals lead to the longer term ones.

Use an engaging and varied base activity that involves each participant in something that he or she enjoys doing.

Use an activity that achieves that engagement while having genuine parallels to the workplace and has relevance with the session goals.

Select an activity that requires the same kind of skill sets and team approaches that are needed at work - albeit one that is removed from the work itself.

Consider using an independent (internal or external) facilitator - to allow all levels to join in as equals and to avoid it feeling like a "sermon from above".

Debrief using a predefined process that highlights the workplace parallels and allows the participants to extract their own learning rather than be preached to.

Use a proven mechanism to transfer the learning back to the workplace, ideally integrated within the debriefing process itself.

If none of these seem important, you are probably looking at a pure fun bonding session. Whether that is a trip to the nearest (or furthest!) bar or something that offers the group an experience that all of its members will enjoy doesn't matter too much.

But if any of them do seem important, then I'd suggest that they all are. If one or more are missing then your team building session will be compromised. And that's a word that sits well alongside mediocrity and underachievement.

### **Team Building is the process of improving collective performance**

A simple but effective **methodology involves:**

- Establishing ownership of shared goals
- Removing inhibitors/blockages to achievement of those goals
- Introducing enablers (awareness, resources, information, processes, etc.) to help achieve those goals

**Team Building is often ineffective because:**

- In many cases, advanced techniques are used whilst there is a lack of buy in to the shared objectives (commitment to team building activities is predicated on commitment to the overall direction/goals)
- Interventions are made out of sequence (e.g.: a poorly defined structure, roles and responsibilities will undermine attempts to improve interpersonal relationships)
- Many offsite events fail to add any real, lasting value because the approach taken to team building is too generic (any offsite event should be designed to meet specific goals and outcomes)
- There is often a lack of understanding of the difference between a group and a team (team building with a group can be counter-productive, detracting from individual performance without any compensatory collective benefit)
- There is a lack of assessment of the team (diagnosis is required in order to develop effective intervention strategies)

### **Objectives**

In the Forming stage (Forming-Storming-Norming-Performing), individuals are committed, at most, to their own objectives. Members will only invest time in Storming activities if they think it is worth it - that is, if the collective objectives are seen as important as their own.

A common mistake is for individuals to think that being committed to their own objectives means they are committed to the team.

As in the age-old metaphor where a house needs to be built on rock, the foundation of all team building is commitment to the shared goal.

### **Techniques**

If team building is viewed as a commodity, as a product to be purchased from a supplier, then it is unlikely to have any lasting value. Having an awayday, playing games or doing fun things will generally lead to lasting and improved collective performance only in the context of a good plan, where events are bespoke (designed to

meet specific objectives and outcomes). In fact, having an awayday without good design is taking a gamble - it may achieve something, be a waste of time, or even damage teamwork.

The choice of intervention strategy depends not only on the current state of teamwork, but on the nature of the people. For highly motivated individuals, it can be enough to set a high level direction and then allow individuals to contribute to the detailed development of the goals. For others, whose natural motivations are more individual, there may need to be objective-based rewards that require teamwork. In some instances, where high levels of teamwork cannot be achieved, they may only be effective in the Forming stage, which is highly dependent on leadership.

### **How to Build Quality into your Team ?**

Quality is primarily viewed in terms of corporate culture, multi-departmental ad-hoc task forces and the salvation of entire companies. This article, instead, will view these ideas as they might be applied by a Team Leader with a small permanent staff.

Quality has become the philosophers' stone of management practice with consultants and gurus vying to charm lead-laden corporations into gold-winning champions. Stories abound of base companies with morose workers and mounting debts being transformed into happy teams and healthy profits; never a day goes by without a significant improvement, a pounds-saving suggestion or a quantum leap in efficiency.

With this professed success of "Quality" programmes, there has evolved a proscriptive mythology of correct practise which has several draw backs:

the edicts call for nothing less than a company wide, senior-management led programme the adherence to a single formula has a limited effect, precludes innovation outside these boundaries, and reduces the differentiation which such programmes profess to engender the emphasis on single-task, specially formed groups shifts the focus away from the ordinary, daily bread-and-butter.

Of course, these criticisms do not invalidate the ideas of Quality but are simply to suggest that the principles might well be viewed from a new angle - and applied at a different level. This article attempts to provide a new perspective by re-examining some of the tenets of Quality in the context of a small, established team: simply, what could a Team Leader do with his/her staff.

### **What is "Quality"?**

In current management writings "Quality" has come to refer to a whole gambit of practices which themselves have resulted in beneficial side-effects; as a Team Leader, you will want to take advantage of these benefits also.

### **The Customer**

In simple terms, attaining Quality has something to do with satisfying the expectations of the customer. Concern for the wishes and needs of customers becomes the focus for every decision. What the customer wants, the company provides. This is not philanthropy, this is basic survival. Through careful education by competitors, the customer has begun to exercise spending power in favour of quality goods and services; and while quality is not the sole criterion in selecting a particular supplier, it has become an important differentiator.

Quality is that something extra which will be perceived by the customer as a valid reason for either paying more or for buying again.

In the case where the product is a service, Quality is equated with how well the job is done and especially with whether the customer is made to feel good about the

whole operation. In this respect Quality often does cost more, but the loss is recouped in the price customers are prepared to pay and in the increase of business.

### **Reliability**

The clearest manifestation of Quality is in a product's reliability: that the product simply works. To prevent problems from arising after the product is shipped, the quality must be checked before-hand - and the best time to check quality is throughout the whole design and manufacturing cycle. The old method of quality control was to test the completed product and then to rework to remove the problems. Thus while the original production time was short, the rework time was long. The new approach to quality simply asserts that if testing becomes an integral part of each stage of production, the production time may increase but the rework time will disappear. Further, you will catch and solve many problems which the final "big-bang" quality-check would miss but which the customer will find on the first day.

To achieve this requires an environment where the identification of errors is considered to be "a good thing", where the only bad bugs are the ones which got away. One of the most hallowed doctrines of Quality is that of zero defects. "Zero defects" is a focus, it a glorious objective, it is the assertion that nothing less will suffice and that no matter how high the quality of a product, it can still be improved.

### **People as Resource**

While Quality has its own reward in terms of increased long-term sales, the methods used to achieve this Quality also have other benefits. In seeking to improve the quality of the product, manufacturers have found that the people best placed to make substantial contributions are the workforce: people are the most valuable resource. It is this shift in perspective from the management to the workforce which is the most significant consequence of the search for quality. From it has arisen a new managerial philosophy aimed at the empowerment of the workforce, decision-making by the front line, active worker involvement in the company's advancement; and from this new perspective, new organizational structures have evolved, exemplified in "Quality Circles".

Without digressing too much, it is important to examine the benefits of this approach. For such delegation to be safely and effectively undertaken, the management has to train the workforce; not necessarily directly, and not all at once, but often within the Quality Circles themselves using a single "facilitator" or simply peer-coaching. The workforce had to learn how to hold meetings, how to analyse problems, how to take decisions, how to present solutions, how to implement and evaluate change. These traditionally high-level managerial prerogatives are devolved to the whole staff. Not only does this develop talent, it also stimulates interest. Staff begin to look not only for problems but also for solutions. Simple ideas become simply implemented: the secretary finally gets the filing cabinet moved closer to the desk, the sales meetings follow an agenda, the software division creates a new bulletin board for the sports club. The environment is created where people see problems and fix them.

Larger problems have more complex solutions. One outcome of the search for Quality in Japan is the system of Just-In-Time flow control. In this system, goods arrive at each stage of the manufacturing process just before they are needed and are not made until they are needed by the next stage. This reduces storage requirements and inventory costs of surplus stock. Another outcome has been the increased flexibility of the production line. Time to change from one product run to the next was identified as a major obstacle in providing the customer with the desired range of products and quantities, and so the whole workforce became engaged in changing existant practices and even in redesigning the machinery.

## **The Long Term**

However, I believe that the most significant shift in perspective which accompanies the introduction of Quality is that long term success is given precedence over short term gains. The repeat-sale and recommendation are more important than this month's sales figures; staff training and development remain in place despite immediate schedule problems; the product's reliability is paramount even over time-to-market. Time is devoted today to saving time in the future and in making products which work first and every time.

## **Team Quality**

While the salvation of an entire corporation may rest primarily with Senior Management, the fate of a team rests with the Team Leader. The Team Leader has the authority, the power to define the micro-culture of the work team. It is by the deliberate application of the principles of Quality that the Team Leader can gain for the team the same benefits which Quality can provide for a corporation.

The best ideas for any particular team are likely to come from them - the aim of the Team Leader must be to act as a catalyst through prompts and by example; the following are possible suggestions.

## **Getting Started**

There will be no overnight success. To be lasting, Quality must become a habit and a habit is accustomed practise. This takes time and training - although not necessarily formal training but possibly the sort of reinforcement you might give to any aspect of good practise. To habituate your staff to Quality, you must first make it an issue.

To succeed, a Quality push must engage the enthusiasm of the entire team; as Team Leader, you must create the right atmosphere for this to happen. Many aspects of team building can be addressed while Quality remains the focus.

You must create the environment where each team member feels totally free to express an idea or concern and this can only be done if there is no stigma attached to being incorrect. No idea is wrong - merely non-optimal. In each suggestion there is at least a thread of gold and someone should point it out and, if possible, build upon it. Any behaviour which seeks laughter at the expense of others must be swiftly reprimanded.

## **Mutual Coaching**

An important aspect of team interaction is the idea of mutual support. If you can instill the idea that all problems are owned by the entire team then each member will be able to seek help and advice when needed from every other team member. One promoter of this is to encourage mutual coaching. If one team member knows techniques or information which would be useful to the rest, then encourage him/her to share it. Specifically this will raise the profile, confidence and self-esteem of the instructor at the same time as benefiting the entire group. And if there is one member who might never have anything useful to impart - send him/her to a conference or training session to find something.

## **Projects must have clear objective**

Clarity of purpose - this is the key to success. You need a simple, stated objective which everybody understands and which everybody can see achieved.

For a small established team, the "customer" includes any other part of the company with which the team interacts. Thus any themes regarding customer

satisfaction can be developed with respect to these so called internal customers. In the end, the effectiveness of your team will be judged by the reports of how well they provide products for others.

A simple innovation might be for a member of your team to actually talk to someone **Building Quality**

Quality costs less than its lack; look after the pennies and the profits will take care of themselves. It is a question of attitude.

We recommend you develop your own team building exercises whenever possible. No outside consulting company knows your company culture as well as you do. However, if you choose to use outside consultants, many can be found on the Internet.

### **Quality for Profit**

By applying the principles of Quality to an established team, the Team Leader can enjoy the benefits so actively sought by large corporations. The key is the attitude - and the insistence on the primacy of Quality. As a Team Leader, you have the power to define the ethos of your staff; by using Quality as the focus, you also can accrue its riches.

### **Motivate Team Building**

If you want team building to work, it's not enough to tell them that they are a team and must perform as one. You also have to show the members of the team that it benefits them personally.

Most of us are selfish individualists. We watch out, first and foremost, for ourselves and do what benefits us most. We have to be motivated to include anyone else. Fortunately, it is pretty easy for us to see the benefits of including others, so most of us do that readily. Love is a strong motivator. Money is another strong motivator. It is one you can use as an employer. However, the strongest motivator available to a manager (since it is unlikely your employees will fall in love with you) is self esteem. The more the individual sees a benefit to his or her self esteem from supporting the team, the more successful your team building efforts will be.

After all that we can understand how important is to build a powerful team to have success in a project. First of all, project managers have to learn how to lead groups to be focused to the total quality.

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