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## Five Simple Strategies to Unify Your Project Teams

[By Lonnie Pacelli]

Do your project team members show confusion about who is responsible for what aspects of the job? Do their conversations and meetings usually end in heated personal attacks? Or do individual members ever exhibit an “every person for themselves” attitude and refuse to help their teammates? If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, then you’re not alone. Sometimes, a team simply doesn’t “gel.”

Every experienced project manager has certainly experienced challenges in getting their teams to behave like...well, teams. But with organization and guidance, you can help your project teams accomplish more and eliminate many of the setbacks and challenges that make teamwork so difficult. Consider the following five strategies for unifying and organizing your teams:

### 1. Establish a Project Organization with Clearly Defined Roles

Project organization must go beyond a hierarchy chart. Each person needs to know what function they play on the team, how they fit into the other functions, and what happens if they don’t do their job.

Depending on your industry or functional discipline, you may employ standard or customary roles on your project. Start with these standard roles that are typical for your type of projects. But if the particular project need warrants a special role that is outside the standard, then create a special role. And if the project doesn’t need a particular standard role, then eliminate it. This may sound easy enough, but many project managers hesitate to deviate from standard roles. At the end of the day, however, results are what matter the most, not how well a team adhered to the standard project role structure.

If the project is unique or the environment doesn’t have standard or customary project roles, take a more pragmatic approach to role definition. Identify three to six aspects of the project that are most important or that pose the most risk. Create roles that encompass the concern or risk areas. Then ensure that all major roles are defined correctly by crosschecking the roles with the work that needs to be done.

This type of project organization addresses concerns or areas of risk head-on by defining a role with a singular point of accountability to manage the areas of your project that are most likely to fail. By doing this, you’ll sleep better knowing that the most crucial areas are covered.

### 2. Eliminate Finger-pointing and Public Fights

Every team project will likely involve lively discussions. Often, these discussions lead you one step closer to project completion. But when they get out of control, these discussions lead to finger-pointing and fighting. Be deliberate in letting these discussions take place and in letting team members question each other, but put a few rules in place to maintain a level of civility.

Allow team members to challenge and stretch, but when a decision is made

everyone must stand behind it as a team. What happens in the room stays in the room; outside of the room the team remains unified. This means no gossiping or badmouthing a team member to outsiders. Also, wrong decisions must be accepted as a team. In other words, no finger-pointing allowed. And finally, don’t allow problems to become personal. Focus on problems, not on people.

Inevitably some rules will be broken. However, you should still strive to get some ground rules in place to avoid team strife whenever possible.

### 3. Develop a “Rallying Cry” to Focus the Team

You can look at any major successful campaign and see the messages that embody them. Consider these classic examples: “Where’s the beef?”; “Got milk?”; and “Plop, plop, fizz, fizz.” All these unifying messages can be associated with a product. Similarly, when driving a project it helps the team to embody some kind of rallying cry or mantra.

Your team’s message should incorporate aspects of the project. For example, say your team needs to be cautious not to over-design a solution to keep costs down. In this case, you might start using a “good enough” rallying cry during the design phase to serve



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as a continual reminder not to overdo the solution. Aside from helping to keep the project within bounds, the rallying cry will also help unify the team.

**4. Hold Team Members Accountable for Delivery**

With team projects, each member needs to clearly understand what he or she needs to do, when it needs to be done, and how the work fits into the big picture. Everyone needs to realize that the team isn't only accountable to the project manager, but they are also accountable to each other. After all, if one person fails, the whole team fails. Therefore, each individual team member must know what everyone else is doing.

Each role should be aware of what is happening in other roles to ensure that all roles know if and how they fit in to those aspects of the project. All roles should also realize that if they fail to meet a deadline or don't perform their jobs adequately, they are letting down the team as a whole, not just the project manager. Meeting or missing deadlines and deliverables are a team issue and should be exposed to the entire

team. The point here is accountability. Each member needs to feel accountable for his or her work and needs to experience the joy of success as well as the discomfort of failure.

**5. Celebrate Victories as a Team**

Driving through a project is tough work, and people can easily get discouraged when the team faces roadblocks or setbacks. Therefore, celebration of key milestones is important to keep morale up and momentum going. These celebrations don't have to be extravagant; they can be as simple as ordering a pizza or bringing in a cake. Anything that allows the team members to let their hair down and take a bit of a breather will suffice. However, too much celebration can lessen the impact of the success and may actually annoy the team members. So celebrate, but do it in moderation.

**Teamwork in the Future**

A well-structured project team means each team member understands his or her role in making the project successful. All project team members knows what they need to

contribute to the project, when they have to perform, what other project team members are doing on the project, and what it takes to be successful. Just as important, each of the team members helps the others to ensure overall project success. When you use these five strategies to unify and organize your teams, you can overcome the common teamwork challenges and make all your future projects more successful.

**Article Abstract:**

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