



INCREASING YOUR PROJECT TEAM'S EFFECTIVENESS

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Not long ago human resources wasn't considered important enough to be separately identified as a primary management function. If you were asked to identify the classic functional divisions within any large company, three areas would probably be named: sales (or marketing), finance, and operations. If human resources was mentioned at all, it was likely to be mentioned as part of operations.

This is understandable. In architecture and engineering, "operations" means project delivery. Even as the design professions become more computerized, projects are not likely to be delivered without the human component—the professionals, technicians, administrators, and clerks—whose responsibility it is to deliver commissioned projects to clients.

Today, human resources is assigned equal weight with sales, finance, and operations. Sometimes, the need for a human resources function is separated out and limited to payroll and benefits issues. However, we are learning that it is even more important to focus on maximizing the effectiveness of those human resources.

Some attention has been paid to maximizing individual effectiveness, particularly in the area of professional development. The continuing education programs in which many professionals are involved as a matter of enlightened self-interest or requirement is an important part of that movement. But there is a very important and little recognized other side—group effectiveness.

Clearly the complexity of work in general, and architectural and engineering work in particular, requires and will continue to require collaboration. More work will be conducted by groups of employees because it is the only way to accomplish the myriad tasks that are involved. Too much knowledge and too many different skills are required for any one person to accomplish all but the simplest tasks. Group effectiveness is critically important to organizational success. Virtually no one practices completely independent of others in the execution of projects. Work is done in project teams. Project teams are groups—people who come together to perform work or task-oriented activities.

In his article, *Group Effectiveness: What Really Matters*, in the Sloan Management Review, Dr. Gregory Shea wrote that despite the numerous research studies done on group effectiveness, what really matters is real-world, real-time group effectiveness. In the practice of architecture and engineering, group or team effectiveness boils down to the delivery of contracted services per agreement—agreement with the client, with one's own firm, and with others to whom the agreement relationship may be less direct, including users, the community, and the public.

Shea cautions that setting up teams to succeed requires careful thought about three issues:

1. Does the team have a clear charter? Does it know what success looks like?
2. The team members and team leader must determine what resources will be required, especially human resources, and whether or not they will be available. The motivation of team members depends not only on their belief that what they are doing is worthwhile, but that it can be done.
3. The manager must decide what kind of team is wanted. If cooperation, teamwork, and synergy really matter, the aim should be for high task interdependence. The jobs of team members should be structured so that frequent interaction gets the job done. Outcomes (for the team) should be dependent upon team performance and rewards distributed equally.

If independent activity is the goal, the aim should be for low task interdependence and large rewards distributed competitively and unequally.

Although there isn't yet a commonly applied set of outcome measures in productivity research, in the worlds of architecture and engineering a combination of both quantitative measures (output) and qualitative measures (output) seems reasonable. Outcome measures of effectiveness for project teams would include design and technical quality, budget and schedule adherence, and client satisfaction.

Much research has been done, however, in the steps or phases that groups go through in their development and in the various conditions that make them effective. In his book, *Process Consultation: Its Role in Organizational Development*, MIT's Edgar Schein has identified several variables to measure group effectiveness:

1. **Goals:** Does the project team know what needs to be accomplished and when? Do team members know what the firm is trying to achieve?
2. **Participation:** Do team members have an opportunity to contribute in team meetings? In team meetings are all team members listened to?
3. **Feelings:** Architects and engineers usually prefer to deal with content, rather than with feelings. Nevertheless, members' feelings can play an important role in the effectiveness of the team. Can team members express their feelings? If they do, do they get empathetic responses?
4. **Diagnosis of team problems:** When process problems arise, are causes addressed, rather than symptoms?
5. **Leadership:** Does the team depend too much on a single person? Do team members other than the nominal leader feel free to volunteer to meet group needs?
6. **Decisions:** Is consensus sought and tested? Are deviations appreciated? Once made, are decisions fully supported by the team?

7. **Trust:** Do team members trust one another? Can they express negative reactions without fearing reprisal?
8. **Creativity:** Does the team seek new and better ways to do things? Are individuals changing and growing? Since more effective groups produce better outcomes, both quantitatively and qualitatively, it is obvious that making groups more effective is very important. A particularly good way is to monitor and measure their effectiveness in the various aspects of group activity. Schein has suggested the use of a diagnostic instrument to help monitor and assess effective group behavior, which we have adapted for application to architectural and engineering teams.

By keeping in touch with those characteristics and qualities that improve team effectiveness, the changes necessary to improve it can be made. The result of improved team effectiveness will be better outcomes. The payoff—the desired outcomes—are powerful and achievable: project profitability and quality, client satisfaction, and individual professional development and growth.