

The Behavioral Side of Project Team Effectiveness

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Project Management is a Team Activity

Project teams have two universal measures; to satisfy the customer, and to deliver on time, on budget and on spec. The rationale for using teams is simple, high performing teams save money and satisfy customers. Unfortunately there is the other side of the coin, poor performing teams cost money and disappoint customers.

If project teams are such a good idea, why are 53% of all projects late, over budget and/or do not meet the project requirements? [1] We have the technology and knowledge to plan and execute projects; the project plans are elegant, the individual project team members are 'the best', and the project management tools are sophisticated. Apparently, we're missing something.

In an effort to better understand this, we have tried many different tools, but the most revealing has been a simple activity we use whenever we work with a project team.

We ask a simple question, "From your experience, what are the things that cause your team to derail"? We record the list on a flip chart and then ask the team members to divide the list into two realms, the 'operational/functional' realm and the 'behavioral' realm. Invariably, the behavioral realm outweighs the operational/functional realm. This predictable outcome is supported by numerous sources, both within and outside the project community.

- In the popular business book, The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, by Patrick Lencioni [2], four of the five dysfunctions are behavioral.
- The Knowledge Team

Effectiveness Profile (KTEP) statistically identified seventeen discriminators of team effectiveness by comparing highly effective teams to less effective teams [3]. The top seven discriminators are behavioral.

- The Agile Alliance, the hub of Agile Software Development, identified four key values. Three of the four are behavioral. [4].

These are three diverse sources, they all say the same thing...behavior is the key.

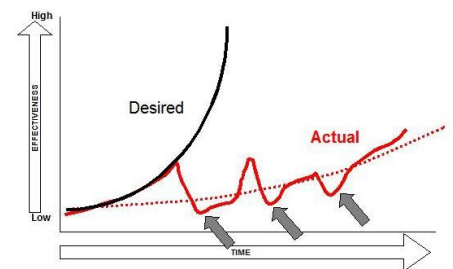
We Talk about the Behavioral, We Act on the Operational

Project management involves the application of a set of tools to carry a team from chartering through successful implementation and evaluation. In my many years helping project teams in a variety of industries and applications move to high performance, I have found that most experienced project managers can draw on their technical tool kit very well. However, where project managers seem to have the most difficulty is around the relationship/behavioral side of team performance. Unfortunately for project managers with this unbalanced skill set, the KTEP research indicates that the greatest discriminators between high performing teams and low performing teams lie in the behavioral areas of:

- Trust
- Cooperation
- Knowledge Sharing
- Inspirational Leadership

Generally, we do not address these until the team derails. Then we react and lose time and productivity.

Typically, organizations put a cross-functional group of people together, call them a team, and jump right into the work of the team. Rarely do they address the relationship of team members and the behavioral capacity of the team as part of the team launch. Addressing the relationship side of project team performance proactively at team launch, is much more effective than trying to address it reactively after open conflict, bruised egos, backstabbing, and hurt feelings interfere with project team productivity Or completely derail the team.



When we form a team we always hope, and often depend on the hope that it will become a high performing team, rapidly. We are frequently disappointed. When we look at the actual development curve of a team contrasted with the desired curve, we notice that it has many peaks and valleys. [Figure 1] A behavioral or relationship issue usually causes the valleys. When something goes awry, we generally throw some training or some type of team building event at it to solve the problem. This is a band-aid approach; it treats the symptoms, not the cause. We get a short-term spike in performance but things usually fall back down into a valley.