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TEAM WORK ON INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS.

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TEAM WORK
ON INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS

SUMMARY :

A successful team will result in Project efficiency and so
lead to a better achievement of the Project objectives. Such
a team will be self-motivating and have a high level of
morale. An effective team will also create a better context
for transfer of know-how and so better prepare its members
for greater roles on future Project teams.

The nature of Project work forces the process of team
building to recognize several facts of life. A Project team
can have a life as short as one year and as long as ten
years. A team usually consists of people on temporary trans-
fer from different departments yet retaining a link of some
sort to their departments of origin. It may consist of
members of one company only or of several as in a joint-
venture and may include Client personnel.

On International Projects, the members of a team may have
different nationalities and be working in a language foreign
to many of them. Many of the Project people may be expatria-
tes to the Project area on a bachelor or on a married status
well away from their head or usual office.

Team building is a complex organizational and human process,
with no mathematical formula for the ideal solution. It
starts with the selection of the right Project Manager who
should be a leader, a technocrat manager and an integrator
all at the same time. The Project Manager must have the
authority to create the organizational and human climate
that will motivate to a maximum each member of the team.

Each member must understand clearly his role and realize
that his contribution to the Project will influence his
career development. Loyalty to the Project Manager must be
possible and the Departmental Manager has to recognize this
necessity.

This presentation will indicate the basic steps of a team
building process on a typical major international Project.

INTRODUCTION :

In the last 20 years, the evolution of Project Management
has tended to be more in the technological areas of manage-
ment. We only have to look at the mass of management infor-
mation systems or risk analysis methods, or the various
sophisticated design calculation systems published to date.
In sharp contrast, little development has been made in the
human aspects of Project Management. True, from time to time,
articles and discussions do reflect on the human side of
Projects. Unfortunately however, they tend to be theoretical
and academic, with little contact with the daily realities
of Project Management and Project life.

The intent of my exposé is to touch upon one particular
aspect of the human side of management : namely team work and
team spirit. Even this specific facet is a vast subject to
treat in one single presentation. However, I will try to
give an overview on the subject, sufficient to prove its
importance and motivate all of us to place as much importan-
ce on establishing the right team spirit on the next Project
as selecting, say the right computerized quantity tracking
system.

The fundamental nature of Project work has a major influence
on team spirit. I refer to the "one off" or "single" life
that Project work entails. Project work is a "batch" type of
work, each batch being unique. This is in opposition to
making shoes or machines or selling consumer goods, which
work is of a repetitive and continuous nature.

In Project work, the P.M. has to create the resources star-
ting from nothing and organize these resources in order to
realize a single unique product, namely the Project. Once
the "product" made the organization has to be liquidated
back into its original elements and these sent back to their
origins. All this means, in the context of a team with its
team spirit, that everyone in the Project organization knows
he is there for a limited period only and also that time is
precious if team spirit is to be created in time to be use-
ful.

A Project team is like a combustion engine. When the pistons
of the engine are firing in the right sequence, at the right
pressure, with the right mixture, plus a few other factors,
then the engine gives optimum power and maximum efficiency
and will operate in the smoothest possible manner. However,
should the pistons fire out of sequence, at the wrong
pressure, or with the wrong mixture, then the engine will
perform less efficiently, less smoothly, and be more costly
to operate.

A team has a similar behaviour. If the right conditions are
not present, then the team will perform badly and ineffi-
ciently, with everyone unhappy, including the Client for
whom the Project is being realized. To make matters worse,
the Project will most likely cost more. One of the most
important conditions that make for efficiency on a Project
is team spirit. In these days of strong international compe-
tition between companies using often similar Project Manage-
ment techniques, there is a constant search to be one step
ahead of the competition. Well, one factor that will help
realize a Project quicker, or cheaper, or with less risks,
is the presence of team spirit on the Project. So, can we
afford to ignore this fact of life ?

WHAT USE IS TEAM SPIRIT ?

So, what is team spirit and what use is it ?

Team spirit is one of those intangible behavioral characte-
ristics of human groups that is difficult to define directly.
So team spirit is more often defined indirectly by the
effects it has when it is either present or absent. How
often have we heard of the remark : "the team performs well,
because there is a good team spirit", or we have heard the
opposite.

There is no mathematical formula to define team spirit.
However, as we all know, when certain conditions are met,
then team spirit is possible and can be maintained. Team
spirit is a kind of active catalyst or activator, which when
present to the right extent, will give positive results in
the quality and quantity of work done, and will generate
cost efficiency.

The slide being projected shows what team spirit can permit
and can achieve.

WHAT IS A TEAM ?

Team spirit is desirable in any type of team that has been
given a task to perform.

The Project team can be small or large. At one extreme, the
team may consist of 2 people and at the other extreme, the
team may be around 2500 at peak, as was the case in a recent
mega-Project. This 2500 incidentally excluded site manual
people. The size of the team will affect the nature of team
spirit possible and the ease with which team spirit is built
up.

Another feature of the Project team influencing team spirit is its nature. It can be constituted by a single department or by several departments, all within one company. Alternatively, the team could be an association of several companies, such as a Consortium or a Joint Venture. Or the team may be one wherein the Client and the companies realizing the Project are all present.

A further important characteristic of a team relating to team spirit, is its life or duration. This can be short, 1 to 2 years, or it can be long, say 5 to 10 years. Some megaprojects go even beyond 10 years.

In addition, there is the geographical and physical location of the team. It may be located in one single area. Alternatively, it may be dispersed in several different areas, either within the same office building, or in different geographical areas within the same country, or in different countries.

There is also the organizational aspect of a team. This can go from an extreme where a unit is loosely held together by tradition or unwritten rules, to a very rigidly departmentalized structure, with tight definitions as to who does what, how, and so on.

INTERNATIONALIZATION OF A PROJECT TEAM :

Then there is the internationalization of the Project. When the Project team works in an international context, this complicates quite appreciably the establishment of team spirit. What is it therefore that makes a Project "international", or what constitutes an international context ?

This is difficult to define, as different criteria are used from one company to another. However, most will agree that the following one or more criteria at least will make a Project "international" :

- The Project work is located in different countries. For example, the engineering office may be in one country, the procurement office in another country, whilst the site is located in a third country.

    or

- The organization realizing the Project in which the team is an integral part, is made up of companies of different nationalities.

    or

- The Project represents an export contract ot the company carrying out the work, as opposed to a domestic contract.

Now, when a Project is international, this results automati- cally in at least one or more of the following consequences :

- Project people may be of more than one nationality. This will mean that some of these people will have different cultural background, speak different mother languages, perhaps be used to different work habits and follow diffe- rent work ethics.

- When the team is dispersed in different countries, the distances between them will affect the working conditions and work procedures of the team. This effect is greater when time zones are involved. We all have heard of the "communication window" problem for spoken communications.

- There are situations where communications between the major parties of the Project team, or between the Project team of the Client and that of the Engineer-Constructor, have to be carried out in a language which is foreign to both of these parties. We can well imagine some of poten- tial problems.

- The Client is of one nationality and the Engineer-Constru- ctor is of another. One of the major consequences of this fact is the potential difference in work ethics each party follows. We all know the unpleasant experience of disco- vering agreements which turned out to be "not-agreements" or vice versa. This often results in stress and strain on the team morale or spirit.

These are some of the features, and there are others, which complicate the smooth "working together" of a Project team on an international Project, as opposed to a domestic Project. If the team is to be inspired by a team spirit, then attention has to be paid to these facts of life.

CREATING TEAM SPIRIT :

With the present state of knowledge, establishing the right team spirit has to be done mostly on a pragmatic basis, with a lot of good common sense and plenty of consideration for the human aspects of the team. There are no mathematical formulas or computer programs to develop the solution. Consi- deration of this aspect of Project work often irritates the "Construction stiff", or the old-fashioned orthodox Project Manager, who will consider any such approach as highly academic, idealistic and timewasting.

I will now describe some basic factors that will create a
Project environment that will be favourable to establishing
team spirit. They are all obvious, this is true. But as
obvious as they may be, experienced Engineer-Constructors
often either ignore them or do not pay sufficient attention
to some of them. Perhaps this brief review of these factors
will act as a reminder. Each factor is not treated in any
depth (time does not permit this), but in the light of my
experience, I have selected those factors which merit a
specific emphasis.

ꭦ The next slide lists these conditions. This review, as I
said earlier on, will not be a scientific or philosophical
analysis. I just want to draw attention to certain aspects
of each factor. The specific nature of each Project will
determine to what extent and how you can set up the condi-
tions so that there is an optimum environment for team spirit.

RESPONSIBILITIES : CLIENT & ENGINEER-CONSTRUCTOR :

One of the factors is the allocation of responsibilities
between the Client and the Engineer-Constructor. This is
perhaps too evident. But everyone has seen occasions where
an experienced Project Manager and his team are confused and
embarrassed because the responsibilities between the Client
and the Engineer-Constructor were badly defined or ambiguous.
This is often the result of compromises or just plain errors
during the contract negociations.

Or how often has the P.M. of the Engineer-Constructor been
instructed to straighten out any problems of responsibili-
ties while making sure that his Company is not a loser and
ensuring that the Client does not complain too loudly. But
even this approach often results in confusion within the
Project team, in deception by the Project people in their
own corporate management. This makes team spirit more diffi-
cult to generate and finally Project work suffers.

This is a difficult factor to influence, let alone control.
But during negociations of contracts, it is wise to some-
times give a thought as to the practicality of the alloca-
tion of responsibilities. The wise Client will always strive
for clear-cut definitions as this will more likely lead to
a successful Project, of which he is the first one to bene-
fit.

EXECUTION OF THE PROJECT :

The manner of realizing the Project is important, not only
do physically realize well the Project, but in providing the

right context for the Project team and its functioning. For
example, the allocation of responsibilities between the
Client and the Engineer-Constructor may be well defined but
the mode of realization is awkward or ill-conceived, with
the consequences that a lot of effort is required of the
team in order to compensate for the shortcomings of the
selected manner of executing the Project.

Or there is the situation where the right manner of reali-
zing the Project is conceived, but insufficient or alterna-
tively excessive resources are made available to the Project.
This can after a while, but not always, demoralize the team
and hence make difficult team spirit and team efficiency.

The geographical distribution of the work and responsibili-
ties and especially the location of the decision making
centres can affect seriously the flexibility of action and
motivation of each geographically distinct Project sub-
office.

THE PROJECT MANAGER :

The fact that the right P.M. is a vital key in the success-
ful realization of a Project is so obvious that it was
tempting to pass over this factor. However, in my personal
experience on international Projects, I have seen the selec-
tion of the P.M. not always done with the care it merited.
It was sometimes a case of Mr AB being more available than
another. Other times, it was because Mr AB speaks the
foreign language concerned. Or perhaps, because Mr AB is
prepared to expatriate himself (sometimes for first time).

The real weakness in the selection of P.M. with most Engi-
neer-Constructors, is the fact that the P.M. has become P.M.
by a haphazard process, rather than by training and person-
nel development. True, Project life can be a good teacher
but it is a learning process that is disorganized and super-
ficial. In particular, P.M.s are not taught what it takes to
face an International Project, especially with a foreign
Client and working in the country of the Client.

Considerable importance is given to his technical ability
and often less attention is given on his leadership and
capacity to motivate a team made up of people temporarily
detached for the project period from other departments. His
"human" skill gets even more critical when the team is mul-
tinational and is located physically in different places in
the world.

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT :

Another critical "conditioning" factor in team work and team spirit is the organizational context of the team. Again this is as evident as the right selection of the P.M. But how often do team members complain about the Project organization, its structure and the distribution of responsibilities and authority, and as a consequence, get disheartened.

Virtually all companies carrying out major Projects have recognized as a must the necessity of having a task force totally dedicated to the realization of the Project. It is equally a fact of life that the Project task force will be mostly made up of personnel lent to the P.M. by various departments or other organizations. What is so critical and important is the terms on which these people are "lent" to the P.M.

The organizational context must be such that it is possible for a P.M. to be a leader and generate loyalty from his team. Each member of his team must also feel, and this is particularly important, that his stay with the Project will affect his career and his pay. The P.M. therefore must have an _equal_ say in the merit increases and promotional opportunities of _each_ member of the team, this influence should not be limited to the Project key members only.

Experienced Engineer-Constructors have practised with success a type of organization, the functional-line type, which in fact allows this motivation of each team member. The project procedures and project discipline developed by the companies help and reinforce the successful use of this organization.

Companies practising for the first time the "functional-line" type of project structure and not imposing firmly project authority create a conflict situation wherein there is a constant battle of authority between the P.M. and the departmental managers. This is not only unproductive and costly to the Project but is demoralizing and confusing to the team and so hinders team spirit. What is not appreciated is that the role of the Departmental Manager is just as important as that of the P.M.

Part of the consideration of the organizational aspect of a team is the physical disposition of the team. It is a fact of life that a team physically located together works more efficiently and will generate team spirit more easily than one that is dispersed. Again, some Departmental Managers have phobias on allowing their people to physically join the Project team for fear of losing them for ever. If the Departmental Manager has this kind of fear, then obviously he has not generated the loyalty that he should have.

PROJECT KEY PERSONNEL :

Obviously the right selection of Project key personnel is
critical. On an International Project with a multinational
team plus expatriation, then selection becomes even more
crucial. Have we not heard at times, in a situation where
things went wrong, certain members of the Project team being
blamed, not on a personal basis, but on the basis of their
nationality. Or have we not seen situations where key posi-
tions were given to personnel of a certain nationality,
irrespective of whether their capability was adequate or
not. Or who has not met the expatriate who behaved in the
foreign country in an unrespectful manner. These are only
examples of what can happen if the Project people do not
have the right personality profile or when the Engineer-
Constructor does not realize the internationality of his
Project.

Project key personnel should certainly be selected on a
technical basis, but on international projects, also for
their capability to live and work side by side with collea-
gues of different nationalities and races. The fact that
different nationalities have different work habits, diffe-
rent work ethics and dissimilar cultures is evident, but it
also has to be recognized and tolerated by each key
personnel.

So to generate team spirit in a multinational team, compre-
hension, tolerance and flexibility are personality charac-
teristics that become important in the profile of the team
members. Add to these characteristics the need for all
members to speak the same language and have the required
technical competence, and one can see the delicate and
difficult nature of selection of Project key members.

Expatriation brings a whole set of problems which are not
conditioned by the personality of the expatriate, but also
by the preparation and terms of expatriation that the
Engineer-Constructor has established. These aspects are
often handled in an amateurish manner by companies who then
are surprised by the low morale or team spirit of the expa-
triates. The indoctrination must look at least at :

- The adequate technical preparation ; policy and procedure
  manuals, and so on

- Adequate familiarisation with foreign country's characte-
  ristics

- Sufficient appreciation by all members of expatriate
  family of expatriation.

COMMUNICATIONS :

Communications is another criterion needing careful atten-
tion if each team member is to feel part of the team. Once
more this is more crucial in the case of International
Projects.

What motivates each team member is :

- not to be left out of the information circle

- to participate in handling some of the communications.

- to be able to originate, receive, sign, or authorize some
  communications.

It often takes little effort to make each Project person
feel motivated within the communication context. For this,
attention has to be paid to :

- Project working language
- translation facility
- speed and reliability of communications
- distribution of communications
- responsibilities and authorities for communications.

So cohesion in a team and team spirit as a consequence, are
aided considerably by taking adequate care and making the
right effort in the communication aspect of a Project.

DECISION MAKING PROCESS :

Finally, there is the decision-making process.

The manner and location of decision-making can influence
substantially the well-being of a Project team and so affect
team spirit.

First of all, there is the geographical location of the
decision-making centers. This can be critical, even with a
Project carried out totally within one office, when this
office is a branch office and does not have adequate dele-
gation of authorities. Therefore, if dispersion of decision
making can not be avoided, it should be done with great care
to avoid this being a source of risks, and in particular,
avoid generating frustration in the Project team. In all
cases, final decision-making should be located within the
Project team, the only place where a total up-to-date pic-
ture is possible. This will also ensure compatibility with
Project policy and a continuity of Project attitude.

Secondly, there is the nature of the decision-making process. Whether this is dictatorial or achieved by consensus, each type of decision-making has its advantages and disadvantages with respect to team spirit. The current trend is decision-making by say one person but with a certain degree of participation by others, so that there is a feeling of participation in the decision taken. The art is to marry expediency of decision with the maximum degree of participation. This is not easy, but the effort is well worth while from a team spirit point of view.

In certain countries, key decisions are often made by the down-and-up method of consensus. In other words, before a manager issues his decision, he checks down the line of hierarchy for the reactions. These are fed back to him and then he issues his decision, perhaps modified, as a result of the checking process. This method is also positive to team spirit but is difficult to apply in certain countries for cultural or social reasons.

PHASES IN CREATION OF TEAM SPIRIT :

Having described some of the factors or conditions that should be looked at so that there is a human environment as favourable as possible for team spirit, I now want to finish with a few words on the timing aspect of the development of team spirit. This is an element that must also be given serious attention, if we do not want to be too late in generating team spirit, or when we have finally achieved it, we want to avoid it suddenly collapsing before the end of the Project.

There are phases concerning team spirit, though each of them is difficult to distinguish precisely on the time scale.

The first phase is the development phase, during which every effort is made to generate team spirit. Once team spirit becomes evident or visible, this then needs to be nursed along or maintained. This second phase which overlaps obviously the development phase, can be called the maintenance phase. Finally, there is the closing out phase. Towards the final stage of the Project, attention has to be paid to team spirit if this is not to collapse like a pack of cards, before the Project is finished. We have all seen the Project which in its final phase, starts letting personnel go back to their original sources and doing this in a clumsy manner, with the result that people lose interest in the job and out of the window goes team spirit.

TEAM WORK

ON INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS

- INTRODUCTION

- TEAM SPIRIT - ITS EFFECTS

- NOTION OF A PROJECT TEAM

- INTERNATIONALIZATION OF PROJECT

- TOWARDS CREATING TEAM SPIRIT

- PHASES - TEAM SPIRIT

A TEAM WITH TEAM SPIRIT

PERMITS :

- HIGHER MEMBER MOTIVATION
- HIGH LEVEL MORALE
- BETTER COMMUNICATIONS
- BETTER TRAINING-ON-JOB

GIVING :

- HIGHER PROJECT EFFICIENCY
- GOOD PROJECT REALIZATION
- HIGHER UPGRADING PERSONNEL
- CLIENT SATISFACTION

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TEAM CHARACTERISTICS

- POPULATION OR SIZE

- NATURE - ONE DEPARTMENT TO JOINT VENTURE

- DURATION TEAM - ONE TO TEN YEARS

- LOCATION - GEOGRAPHICAL & PHYSICAL

- ORGANIZATION - STRUCTURE & RULES

INTERNATIONAL   PROJECT

DEFINITION :

- PROJECT WORK LOCATIONS
- "CORPORATE" ORGANIZATION OF TEAM
- EXPORT CONTRACT

SOME CONSEQUENCES :

- MULTINATIONAL TEAM
- COMPLEX COORDINATION LOGISTICS
- MULTI-LINGUAL COMMUNICATIONS
- CLIENT & ENGINEER-CONSTRUCTOR ≠ NATIONALITIES

SOME PROBLEMS :

- COMMUNICATION & INFORMATION
- DIFFERENT WORK ETHICS
- DIFFERENT CULTURES
- DECISION-MAKING - LOCATION & NATURE

BASIC FACTORS

TOWARDS TEAM SPIRIT

- RESPONSIBILITIES : CLIENT - ENGINEER/CONSTRUCTOR

- HOW PROJECT IS EXECUTED

- PROJECT MANAGER

- ORGANIZATION CONTEXT

- PROJECT KEY PERSONNEL

- COMMUNICATIONS

- DECISION MAKING PROCESS

PROJECT

EXECUTION PLAN

- DETERMINES PROJECT PLAN

- ESTABLISHES PROJECT RESOURCES

- GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

INTERNATIONAL PROJECT·MANAGER

SELECTION

IDEALLY SHOULD BE :

- TECHNOCRAT
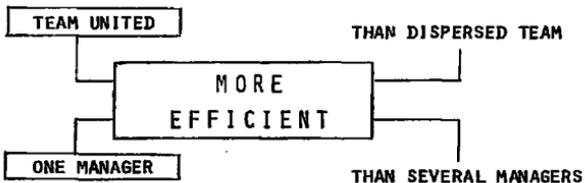- INTEGRATOR
- LEADER
- TRAINED

WHICH MEANS :

- EASY COMMUNICATOR
- CULTURAL AWARENESS
- FOREIGN COUNTRIES EXPERIENCED
- FLEXIBLE BUT CONSISTENT
- SKILLED DECISION-MAKER
- HICH MOTIVATOR
- FIRM DISCIPLINARIAN

TEAM SPIRIT

ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

FACT:

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┌─────────────┐
│ TEAM UNITED │            THAN DISPERSED TEAM
└─────────────┘
        └──┌──────────────┐──┐
           │    MORE      │
           │  EFFICIENT   │
        ┌──└──────────────┘──┘
┌─────────────┐
│ ONE MANAGER │            THAN SEVERAL MANAGERS
└─────────────┘
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THEREFORE:

PHYSICAL   —   LOCATE TEAM TOGETHER

HUMAN   —   SET UP CONDITIONS FOR LEADERSHIP
               & LOYALTY TO P.M.

TECHNICAL —   P.M. SOLE AUTHORITY FOR PROJECT
               PERFORMANCE

           —   DEPARTMENTAL MANAGER AUTHORITY
               FOR FUNCTIONAL PERFORMANCE

PROJECT KEY PERSONNEL

INTERNATIONAL PROJECTS

SELECTION :
- TECHNICAL COMPETENCE
- PERSONALITY PROFILE

EXPATRIATION PROFILE :
- "TWICE" AS COMPETENT TECHNICALLY
- "DOUBLY" FLEXIBLE, COMPREHENSIVE & PERSISTENT
- CARE WITH FAMILY CONTEXT & PREPARATION

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T E A M   S P I R I T

C O M M U N I C A T I O N S :

	- BE INSIDE INFORMATION CIRCLE
NEEDS :	- PARTICIPATE IN HANDLING
	- BE AN ORIGINATOR...
	- PROJECT WORKING LANGUAGE
	- TRANSLATION
ATTENTION TO :	- SPEED & RELIABILITY"
	- DISTRIBUTION
	- RESPONSIBILITIES & AUTHORITIES

slide 10

DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

LOCATION :
- MUST BE WITHIN PROJECT ORGANIZATION
- ADEQUATE DELEGATION TO EACH
  PROJECT SUB-GROUP

NATURE :
- DICTATORIAL
- CONSENSUS
- PARTICIPATION
- DOWN & UP

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TEAM SPIRIT - TEAM WORK

P H A S E S :

- SETTING   UP

- MAINTENANCE

- CLOSING   OUT

slide 12