

Practical examples: Project coaching

Efficient realisation of an international automobile project, from the planning stage in Germany to production in the United States.

Summary:

The efficiency of an international project was significantly improved through the common clarification of the project status and goals, agreeing to mutual expectations as to co-operation, as well as an optimised organisational structure. Also, there was an improvement in the personal commitment of the participants and the resolution to drive the implementation.

Basic Situation:

The team building and integration proved difficult during the automobile project to be implemented in USA, with significant losses through tension, with negative effect in the pursuit of the goals set. The participants: "The managers are sitting in their ivory towers and can't see the wood for the trees. Moles are tunnelling through the earth and disrupting the implementation of any agreements. Normally, I sit out the problem."

Clear 'insular thinking', lack of candour and scant interest in the overall project. Quote: "They are all sitting with their backs to each other in the project room and each is doing whatever he wants. There are no clear goals and time is running out."

Language and cultural differences. Quote: "There's a shark-infested lake between the USA and Germany."

A heterogeneous team with differing views about work and procedures, participant roles and responsibilities. Mr Meier (name changed) about Mr Schulze: "He's a submarine. We expect our boss, Dr Schulze, to give us clear directions and to take stronger action if agreements are not honoured."

Inefficient meetings. Quote: "We waste far too much time on everyone's ego, which is tantamount to saying that everything has actually been said, but not yet by everybody."

Objectives:

1. Improved co-operation and reduction of losses through tension
2. Enhanced efficiency in the project to achieve the project goals
3. Integration of subprojects and involvement of relevant internal and external interfaces
4. At a later stage, consultation during the migration of the project organisation in Germany to the line organisation in the USA.
5. In the USA, integration of 2 production lines and 2 cultures

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Approach:

At the outset, a kick-off workshop brought transparency in respect of the current situation. The project status and goals were clearly defined. It became apparent that the expectations of the project manager and of the team as regards the management of the project differed. An efficient meeting structure was developed jointly. Emerging tensions between participants could be revealed and addressed at an early stage. A package of measures was agreed to secure results, drive the project forwards and to increase efficiency:

Regular integration workshops to realise optimum co-ordination and efficient interlinking of the work flows of the subprojects, to optimise co-operation within the team as well as with the interfaces, and to perform an ongoing review of project milestones to review goals, goal achievement, roles, responsibilities and project structures.

Meeting sit-ins to ensure an ongoing control over the implementation, to identify and exploit improvement potential, to enhance efficiency and review the behaviour of individuals.

Coaching the project manager and other key persons to improve control and management skills, in conflict management, in personal feedback and to advise in the case of specific issues in the work context.

Over a period of 24 months, the following results were achieved as a result of the integration workshops (held every 6-8 weeks), meeting sit-ins (initially in a 1-12 week cycle) and one-to-one coaching sessions.

Results (after 2 years):

- ❖ Clarification of the project status and common understanding of the goals, commitment of the participants
- ❖ Definition of mutual expectations, clear agreement on roles and responsibilities, and active acceptance of these
- ❖ Enhanced implementation resolution
- ❖ Development of an efficient meeting structure
- ❖ Changes in the organisational structure aimed at achieving the project goals
- ❖ Improved co-operation and integration

Dr Schulte (initially project manager and ultimately construction manager with more than 1,000 employees): "I have personally learned a great deal... about myself, my manner towards employees, dealing with external suppliers, politics within the company, cultures and the differences between them, and I can only recommend this kind of project coaching for all projects." The process also resulted in 2 follow-up orders...

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Further Motives for Project Coaching:

- ❖ Improved co-operation for more efficient goal achievement
- ❖ Reduction of areas of tension, power struggles and diverging goals and interests
- ❖ Dismantling resistance to organisational changes, mergers and restructuring
- ❖ Support for the development and implementation of structures, processes and organisation
- ❖ Support in definition: order specification, planning and implementation of change, organisation and development projects

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