



Project Team Chemistry:

How to Keep the Mix from Being Too Caustic

Notices

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Attention Software Implementation Project Managers: Has this ever happened to you? ...

It's Monday morning, six weeks before your rollout; you're ready to kick off your conference room pilot. This will be the final shakedown of the software, modifications, integrations and processes that will support the new system. You visit the IT department to check on your team's "techie" who was to load your test data, preparing the data base for your two-week test. As you approach his desk, you can tell something is wrong. And what you hear is...

"Jim, I'm sorry, but I didn't get the data loaded. The boss upgraded his laptop to Doors '99 last week and decided he wanted the whole office upgraded over the weekend so he could try out the messaging feature today. I had no time to load the data."

The project just lost three days. All the resources lined up to do parallel testing will twiddle their thumbs while data is loaded, or worse, be lost back to their production units. You've just been a victim of the "10% Resource".

The success of a software implementation is dependant on several key factors, in part:

- Management commitment
- Clear objectives
- Clear requirements
- Adequate funding
- Selection of the correct software vendor
- Assignment of proper implementation team resources

This is about the last point, assignment of project team resources.

The probability of delivering a software implementation project on time and on budget is improved in direct proportion to the quality of personnel assigned to the project team. As a corollary, the amount of pain it will take to deliver the system and supporting processes is inversely proportional to the quality of the personnel mix on the team.

Companies will spend hundreds of thousands of dollars purchasing software, hardware and consulting services and then neglect to assign the right internal resources to the project team that will be responsible for those hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The project team needs the right balance of skills and personalities to successfully implement a company-wide system and re-engineer the processes that will support it.

So, what are some of the mistakes a company might make when assigning personnel to their project team?

You've already met the **10% Resource**. This is the poor guy (or gal) who is given a key project role, but, oh by the way, is expected to keep up with 100% of their current job as well. What happens? Well, this resource gets his review from the supervisor of his regular job, so the project is his second (or third, or fourth, or fifth) priority. Key project team roles must have a *100% time commitment*.

How about the **Problem Child**? This is the guy nobody wants, but nobody can get rid of. He's passed around like a baby with a dirty diaper. A "special project" is often a place to dump this character under the guise of a "motivational assignment". This under-achiever will under-achieve on your software implementation project just like he did on his regular job. Key positions need to be filled by key people. You need the best in order to assure that the company gets a return for its investment. Software implementations cannot be a place to hide bad actors. *Achievers* are needed.

Have you ever been on a project with **Ralph Retiree**? He's biding his time until bass (or deer, or racing, or whatever) season starts so he can retire and start doing what he really wants to do. Software implementations can become a dumping ground for the "less than *motivated*" employee.

Meet the **Socialite**. This has nothing to do with gender. This is the person who loves to chat all day long. The day is one long coffee break. Their personal life can interrupt and dominate meetings. They can often spend more time on the phone or in the hallway, talking with friends than focusing on project tasks. They're usually the first one out the door when the clock approaches quitting time. A major software implementation project needs *focused* individuals.

Then there's the **Recluse**. There is a dynamic that develops between implementation team members. This dynamic is an energy and focus that comes from knowing what needs to be done, knowing what each member's tasks are, and communicating continually. This continual communication is essential, particularly for the early surfacing of issues that can impact the project. The **Recluse** tends to keep to himself. He concentrates on his little piece of the project and erects silo walls around himself. *Fully engaged* people are needed to insure the success of your implementation project.

When it comes to large, software implementation projects, *if you want the best results, assign the best people*.

Who are the best people? The best people are those with the skills, motivation and personality to support a project through its life cycle. Think of projects as having stages and paths. Stages are the life cycle stages of an implementation project (initiation, construction, pre-rollout, rollout, post rollout). The paths are functional areas that cut through all life cycle stages (process, data, technical, people, management). The skills and personalities that are needed on the successful project team closely parallel these paths that the project team must travel.

For example, every project needs a **Techie**. This is the person that will lead the technical charge and see that the system is correctly installed, tested and maintained. This person may end up being a system administrator. They need to have moderate to excellent skills in

hardware, software, networking and data base maintenance. Education in terms of degrees is not as important as the ability to sniff out problems, knowing how to ask questions and a drive to make things work. One plant in south Texas found an excellent system administrator in the form of a tradesperson from a maintenance team. This individual loved to come to work early just so he could find out what he could make the computers in the office do. He became so good at working with computers he was made the full time maintenance system administrator.

You also need the **Encyclopedia**. This is the person who knows where everything is and what its name is. This is the person you need to lead the effort to identify and clean the data you will be loading into your new system. You also need this person to support the development of business processes and data integrations. The ideal candidate is a subject matter expert (SME) in the area where the new software will be used. If they don't know something, they know where to go to get an answer. In seeming contradiction to what was said above, a potential SME may be the person near retirement or one that can be called out of retirement on a contract basis to assist in process development and data scrubbing. This person is often a wealth of knowledge that can be useful in sorting out the data and processes on which your project is dependent. The caveat is, test this person's motivation and work ethic before selecting them for the project.

You need a **Trainer**. This person loves to show people how to do things. They will learn the system, develop training materials, arrange the classes and train the new users. They'll also be key in identifying the roles and security set up needed to support the end user. The trainer will be the project cheerleader, developing employee awareness programs and keeping company personnel abreast of project developments as the rollout day approaches. Their personal driver is the desire to make their co-workers succeed in using the new system. If you hear it said of a person that they're "helpful", you may have found your trainer.

The **Facilitator** will be the one to smooth out your processes. He often works hand-in-glove with the "Encyclopedia" to ferret out the processes that will be needed to support the new system. The Facilitator may not have the subject matter expertise of the "Encyclopedia", but he has the ability to draw out information and negotiate change.

Finally, you need the **Nag**. This of course is the project manager. If he were your mother, he'd remind you to pick up your socks. The Nag is a person obsessed with checklists and calendars. He needs a Teflon ego and a cast iron stomach, and most of all, he needs the trust and support of company management who are dependent on him to deliver the project on time and on budget. If you're the project manager and don't think of yourself as a "Nag," get an assistant that fits the profile. They will annoy you, but they will keep you on track.

Key factors for project success were listed above. One of those was "Management commitment". Systems are purchased for the purpose of improving a company's performance and thereby its bottom-line. When you consider hardware costs, software license fees (or development costs), consulting costs and support fees, software implementations are expensive. Management will only realize a return on its investment if it fully commits to the project. One of the most important ways management shows its commitment is by allowing the project manager to choose the "best of the best" for the project team and allowing him to keep them for the life of the project.

That way, when it is Monday morning, six weeks before the roll-out, and the project manager is ready to kick off the conference room pilot, he'll visit the IT department to check on the "techie" who was to load the test data over the weekend. As the PM approaches the techie's desk, what he hears is...

"It's ready to go. I'll hang around for a couple of hours to make sure everything is okay. Then I'm going home for a shower and a nap. You'll be able to reach me on my cell phone if anything comes up."

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