

Mind the Gap in Project Execution

Strong Teams Deliver Effective Projects



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Overview

In London's efficient and complex underground metro, a simple warning is called out over the PA thousands of times a day cautioning commuters to pay attention to the distance between the train and the sidewalk. It cautions busy, distracted people who certainly *know* better than to trip on an uneven surface in order to mitigate that very risk.

Volumes have been written on how organizations and capital project teams can achieve high performance; yet oil, chemical and energy companies across the globe still wrestle with projects that fail to meet business objectives. This paper will focus on the common denominator that is the single most influential factor in project success: competent people united in a common purpose who understand their interdependencies and are motivated to collaborate and deliver.

The Issue

CII, IPA and Owner/Operators are in violent agreement regarding familiar culprits of project failure to meet production promises. In today's environment of shifting global markets, such issues are exacerbated as business objectives are often reset in mid-flight after stage/gates are passed. Large, complex project often require geographically dispersed Owner and Contractor teams and suffer from a shortage of skilled craft construction labor. Large, complex projects amplify the need for clear expectations between Owner and Contractors who have always had very different business drivers. Fueled by lack of communication and lack of trust, unmet expectations by the parties result in rework and conflict. In both Owner and Contractor organizations, adequate resources, skills and experience are not matched to the work. The result is lack of realistic and shared baselines that lead to time delays and cost escalation.

There is one gap whose potential to breach all other gaps is often ignored, or at least not fully harnessed. When project leaders "mind the gap" of *team integration* by giving it the same priority as project deliverables, a shift occurs that is often visible and tangible in high performing teams. Team integration is a natural outcome of strong project leadership, long recognized as the primary determinant of project success. Strong leaders set the tone; they establish the project culture ("the brand"); they listen to the team; they make timely, tough decisions; but above all else, strong leaders integrate their teams in 3 key areas: project goals, execution plans, and clear roles and responsibilities. They recognize that not only is the "soft stuff" really the "hard stuff," but also by focusing on relationships, building trust and transparency, and encouraging the giving and receiving of feedback, they position the team to deliver predictable outcomes.

Mind the Gap in Project Execution

The Shift

Great leaders recognize that team integration is intrinsic to doing the work, not separate or distinct from it. While offsite workshops are a common, value-added event at the start of a new project phase, they do not satisfy the need for continuous re-alignment with diligent, daily attention to interfaces. An interface manager focused on technical interfaces is necessary; however, non-technical integration focused on communication, conflict resolution, behaviors, and accountability is equally important.

Organizations do not perform work. People do. They bring their experience and expertise, but also the biases, vulnerabilities and beliefs. And people seek to meet 3 basic needs:

- “Being” is recognition of expertise and the needs of the team member on and off the job.
- “Belonging” is acceptance and inclusion; seeing the bigger picture and one’s place in it.
- “Becoming” is the opportunity for personal growth, challenge and opportunity.

Project team members are usually equipped with the necessary technical competencies to deliver. What often requires reinforcement are interpersonal skills, such as listening, collaborating, decision-making, communicating and resolving conflict. Leaders “mind the gap” by starting with a look in the mirror. Alignment begins with the leadership team itself practicing the very behaviors they want to be visible in their direct reports: a shared purpose, transparent communication, respecting differences in others, valuing ideas and contributions of others, and keeping commitments. Leaders must move from a “group of leaders” to a true “leadership team.”

Taking Action

So what are the mechanisms by which a Project Leadership Team achieves alignment? Often it is the Project Manager that has the experience and personal attributes to provide behavioral coaching to his/her own direct reports, both individually and collectively. However, on large, complex projects, especially those with geographically dispersed team members, it is suggested that the Project Manager delegate aspects of this responsibility of team alignment to a member (s) of his/her leadership team. This is also the case when business alignment and managing multiple stakeholders consumes much of the time and energy of the Project Manager.

The emphasis is that team alignment does not occur without deliberate actions and attention. The “role” (distinct from position) of the Team Integration Manager/ Coach should be defined and

Mind the Gap in Project Execution

executed with the same importance as that given to the role of the Technical Interface Manager throughout the project life cycle. The qualifications to fill this role are competency and experience not only in project execution, but also in the basic team skills of giving and receiving feedback, communicating expectations, and resolving and even harnessing the power of differences.

Team integration mechanisms include, but are not limited to:

- Creating a project brand that transcends employer allegiance
- Celebrating accomplishments
- Fostering Leader and Peer Recognition
- Aligning the business, stakeholders and the project team
- Refocusing often on project goals
- Developing and fostering commitment to a Project Charter
- Developing a Team Covenant – how members agree to treat one another

If resources are not available within the company, then this role can be outsourced to a qualified third party who also has the advantage of an unbiased perspective.

Only when the Project Leadership Team has achieved alignment, is it possible to cascade clarity of goals, execution plans and roles throughout the layers of leaders in the Owner expanded project team. This next step is itself an investment in driving clarity of expectations, commitments and accountability across all delivery teams and functional support teams.

And only when Owner Teams are aligned can they begin to build relationships and trust with the Contractors and Suppliers upon whom they rely. Again, the role of the Team Integration Manager/ Coach ensures focus and priority in the assessment of gaps in these critical interfaces.

So what is the evidence of team integration? You will recognize it when you see it.

- Leaders are visible, supportive and decisive.
- Each team member owns the goals, decisions and all deliverables, not just those specific to their discipline or function.
- Pathways are established to resolve conflict and reinforce team culture.
- Communication and information flow support decisions and drive the work.
- The right people have the right information, when they need it.
- There is a climate of energy, pride and satisfaction prevalent in performing the work.

Mind the Gap in Project Execution

As is often true, the solution is simple, but not easy. Project leaders are effective at managing both technical and non-technical risks, but they often overlook the greatest risk under their control. Closing the gap on ineffective leaders and misaligned delivery organizations is necessary to ensure capital effectiveness.

About Endeavor

Endeavor Management, is an international management consulting firm that collaboratively works with their clients to achieve greater value from their transformational business initiatives. Endeavor serves as a catalyst by providing pragmatic methodologies and industry expertise in Capital Project Effectiveness, Transformational Strategies, Operational Excellence, Organizational Effectiveness, and Transformational Leadership.

The firm's 40-year heritage has produced a substantial portfolio of proven methodologies, deep operational insight and broad industry experience. This experience enables our team to quickly understand the dynamics of client companies and markets. Endeavor's clients span the globe and are typically leaders in their industry.

Endeavor's Capital Project Effectiveness practice provides solutions to Oil & Gas, Petrochemical and Heavy Industrial clients that are currently adapting to dramatically changing market conditions. Recognizing the industry trend is an increased failure rate of projects to achieve their cost, schedule, and business performance objectives, Endeavor has brought together a core team of uniquely qualified project leaders with deep, hands-on experience with capital projects. These professionals can address both the "hard" and "soft" issues – structure (process/technical) and people (leadership and teamwork).

The Capital Project Effectiveness team works side-by-side with commercial leaders and project delivery owners, contractors and service organizations and teams to identify the issues and bring solutions. The approach is grounded in the premise of delivering results through a focus on simplification and what matters most.

For more details, please visit the Endeavor Management Capital Project Effectiveness solution website:

<http://www.endeavormgmt.com/capital-project-effectiveness/>