

Effective Teams for Complex Projects. An MPA seminar held at the Institution of Civil Engineers, 1 Great George Street, London, 23 May 2001

MPA events are confidential, although this summary has been compiled so as not to breach confidentiality. Full proceedings and entry to MPA events are available only to members.

Participants

More than 60 participants attended the seminar and the following organizations were represented:

Avecia, BAA Plc, Baker & McKenzie, Balfour Beatty, Bechtel Water, British Energy, Coaching Perspectives, Electronic Data Systems, Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer, GlaxoSmithKline, Ineos Fluor Ltd, KSP Development, Laing Ltd, Lancaster University, Lockheed Martin UK Integrated Systems, MACE Consulting, Mott MacDonald Group, Mouchel, National Grid Plc, National Air Traffic Services Ltd, PA Consulting Group, PLC Consultants, Rolls-Royce Plc, Scott Wilson Kirkpatrick, Sir Robert McAlpine Ltd, Sodexo, Strategic Rail Authority, Thames Water Utilities, Union Railways, WS Atkins Rail, WSP South Ltd

The presentations included:

The British Airways Waterside Project

The ICI CFC Replacement Programme

Global Supply-Chain Integration at SmithKline Beecham

The Introduction of Digital TV at the BBC

Euston Station Reconfiguration

Major projects completed against a particularly complex background often stand or fall on the strength of the project teams. What factors are associated with successful teamworking?

Major projects from five very different sectors—construction, chemicals, pharmaceuticals, television and the railways—show how effective teams have been built, sustained and empowered to deliver diverse and difficult projects. Soft and hard projects were involved: innovative product development, supply-chain integration, the introduction of the digital TV, renewal of railway infrastructure, and the construction of a new office HQ linked to business change.

Project complexity

Major projects may be especially complex for a number of reasons:

- rapidly developing technology
- requirement for innovation
- numerous interfaces
- changing client requirements
- pressure to deliver within tight timescale
- pressure to deliver at a lower or very competitive cost
- multidisciplinary project team, drawn from many firms
- remote location of some team members
- remote location of “end-users” in business change projects for international companies.

Creating the team

In appointing the team, what criteria should be used?

- select people able to adapt to the project culture
- get a good mix of “ideas” people and cautious types, with the right blend of skills, experience and attitudes
- involve people from all functions early on
- provide training and team building sessions, especially for an integrated project team—it enhances performance, stimulates new ideas and unites the team
- harness the benefits of collaborative working where possible.

Managing the team

And once the project is under way, what are the key factors in team management?

- communicate, communicate, communicate (intranets, extranets, newsletters, training and team-building all help)
- co-locate the project team, if possible, and provide the right project management tools

Case study 1

The CFC replacement programme at ICI

In the 1970s, the power of CFCs to destroy the ozone layer was discovered and the 1987 Montreal Protocol made provision for CFCs to be phased out. The race to get a safe replacement product on the market was on.

This was an opportunity for ICI to raise its position among the global players in the chemicals industry. Clear, discrete project goals were set and a team assembled. The emphasis was on inventiveness and creativity, in an informal environment. There was no shame or blame attached to making mistakes—indeed, there were not many—and decisions sometimes had to be taken on the basis of incomplete information (and revised if necessary) to keep the momentum going.

It was a measure of this highly creative and supportive forum that the the best chemistry idea came from an engineer and the best engineering idea from a chemist. All the hard targets for development and production were met, in fact they were beaten. There was real teamwork and the project has become legendary among its veterans as being one of the best projects ever to have been part of.

- maintain clear, simple objectives (revise them if you have to) so that people know what they are working towards
- keep it informal—most teams respond to an informal environment, without an overtly hierarchical structure
- don't suppress inventiveness—maintain open thinking
- learn to deal with cultural and functional diversity
- maintain the no-blame culture, even when times are tough
- give team, not individual, rewards
- as a leader, try to create an environment in which the team can excel, remembering there is no template for leadership
- and remain flexible as a leader: you may in turn need to orchestrate the project, keep things moving) and advise on the best approach).

Delivering the project through team effort

And to ensure successful project delivery...

- a simple structure with clear decision-making means that the waters don't get muddied
- visible sponsorship of the project at senior level inspires confidence
- in a business change project for a multinational, where employees around the world will be affected, secure local buy-in and participation
- where a project has wide ramifications, help everyone affected to align implementation with strategy
- pride is a strong motivation among team members: on the CFC replacement project, the team took pride in beating the competition and helping to save the planet's ozone layer; on the BBC digital project, it was important to be first in digital TV, ahead of Sky
- money is also a strong motivation: on some projects, delivery/implementation can be linked to bonuses.

Case study 2

BA offices at Waterside

The BA Waterside project was two projects in one: a new office for British Airways and a business change project. The new building was intended to act as a catalyst for business change—much needed, as BA was dispersed over 20 offices. In these circumstances it was difficult to build a cohesive culture and maintain similar working practices.

The project manager Mace was unusually close to the client's business case, so that the construction project could be made to match client needs

precisely. Mace took care to align its own vision to that of BA. The project management put the emphasis on attitude and values, not just on process. Factors for success included good communications, minimal bureaucracy, an integrated design process, co-location and a no-blame culture.

As a result, the project was delivered four months early and within budget. The working culture of BA has improved and the business benefits linked to the project are being achieved.