7 The Project Team

A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE WORD TEAM

In projects, all of the people associated with a project are working toward the achievement of a common goal. Because of the extent of work, the demanding schedule, and different skills needed, most projects require more than one person. Let’s expand on the concept of a team by identifying how they will be working together.

1. They will be working on tasks that involve more than one person.
2. Some people’s tasks will require milestones or end products from the tasks of other people on the team.
3. The team will share common methods and tools.
4. The team will have to identify and solve issues together and live with the results (together).
5. Most importantly, the project will sink or swim depending on the final end product. If one person screws up, the team suffers.
It is the interdependence and accountability for the final result that makes it in everyone’s self-interest to have the team succeed.

TEAM MEMBERS—DIFFERENT MEMBERS OF THE CAST OF A PLAY

In a play we have several different types of players:

1. The backers of the play—management, producers, and investors
2. Director—the project manager
3. Main players—people who remain in the play during all or almost all acts and most scenes
4. Bit players—people who come into the play for specific scenes and roles and then disappear
5. Cameo players—often, big-name stars whose appearance adds luster to the play; management in doing reviews is one example of a category of cameo player.

Why are we concerned with the cast? First, the traditional concept that all team members are full-time project members is increasingly obsolete with corporate downsizing. There are fewer good people and they have to be spread around on different projects. You also don’t want to have nonproductive people on your team and be stuck with them. A second reason is that to attract good people we have to define the timing and a minimum amount of time to allow them to be deployed on other projects. If we ask for too much, we will get nothing or a runner-up person assigned. Third, you want to bring in fresh blood and a new outlook. Otherwise, the project can become inbred and out of touch with reality.

ISSUES REGARDING TEAMS

Now that we know why we need a team and the types of team members, we can identify and start to address key issues regarding teams.

• Where do we start in forming a team?
• How large a team should we have?
• How do we assemble a team?
• How can we attract good team members?
• How do we manage the team?
• How do we bring on new team members?
• How do we remove team members?
• What types of problems arise in teams? How can we deal with these?

GETTING THE TEAM

As we stated previously, there is a natural competition here for team members. That is, the project manager has to attract people from the
functional and line organization of the company or agency. These people have current projects and work that will compete with your demands.

Let’s assume that you have the project objective and general schedule defined. We will also assume that you have thought about the methods and tools that the project will use. Sit down and consider project risk. Among all the things that have to be done, where is the greatest risk? It is not just in some arcane technical area. People often overlook the following areas:

- Getting a lot of routine design or semitechnical work done quickly. You are after fast and good performers.
- Being able to integrate pieces of a project and test them or evaluate them. Integration is a very difficult skill to acquire and master.
- Good writers. If you have a project that requires substantial documentation, then you want to find good writers.

How do you define what you need? From our discussion in Chapter 4, follow these steps:

1. Lay out a general task plan of 50 tasks, if you have not already done so. Make sure that these tasks cover the project.
2. For each task, identify the skills and knowledge you need. Label each task with the department where you are likely to find the resource and the skills that are critical.
3. Now think about dependencies between the tasks, extent of effort, and the scheduling of the tasks. You are trying to develop a general idea of how much effort you will need and when it will be required for each task.

When you have completed these steps, you should review them with management to get a reality check. You should have identified a core set of players for your play. Off on the side you have also identified the bit player roles.

PROJECT TEAM: THE POLITICAL DIMENSION

You must ensure that the project team contains people from all organizations that are involved or impacted by the project. This might include administrative groups such as internal audit, information systems, and general services (or general administration), as well as line organizations. If the manager indicates that they do not need to be involved, you can accept this, but return periodically, give them an update, and offer them participation again.

TEAM SIZE

From many projects we know that the golden rule is to have a small team. However, too small a team may mean that critical skills are missing
or team members overworked. The advantages of a small team (and, hence, the disadvantages of a large team) include the following:

- Coordination is easier with fewer people.
- There is less time spent in informing people of what is going on and in getting status updates.
- People tend to have more flexibility and greater accountability because they have more tasks individually and do more tasks themselves.
- The project manager can be involved in doing some of the work.

We also know from many projects that the larger the project team, the more likely the project is to run into problems and failure. Communications overhead is directly related to team size.

GETTING THE TEAM MEMBERS

You have to think about the personal attributes that you seek. This is a trade-off. Some of the key attributes are listed below.

1. Experience relates to having done similar projects in the past.
2. Knowledge relates to the experience and expertise with the methods and tools. Remember that if you bring in a person who is a tool expert, they will attempt to use the tool on whatever you give them. This is specialization.
3. Business process experience is often critical. You are looking for a person who knows how the eventual user of the project thinks and works.
4. Problem solving ability. If you have a complex, fuzzy project, then you may want people who are good at problem identification and solving.
5. Availability is a double-edged sword. Often, the people who are most available are the ones you do not want. However, if you are given someone who is already overcommitted, you will not get much.
6. Ambition, initiative, and energy—we have found that these qualities are very rare and that they make up for a lot of shortcomings in other areas.
7. Technology. Beware of people who know too much about the technology. They may be technology dabblers—people who like to study it, but who cannot get down and do the work. Can you afford technology appreciation?
8. Communications skills. Everyone wants this, but the people have to work and not just communicate. Some people are great communicators, but do not perform.

After thinking about what you want and what skills you seek, try and find out through the "grapevine" who is good, who is available, and who might want to be on your project. In some organizations, you might interview them directly. In larger organizations you have to go to a functional manager and request the people. For example, you might prefer someone who is younger and less experienced, but is more ambitious, knows current tools and methods, and is available.
Getting the Right People

Make an appointment to see the manager. Tell the manager that you wish to discuss your project requirements for staffing. Also, point out that you have made an effort to minimize your requirements and that you will bring project documents with you to prove it. When you enter the manager’s office, give them the following items: (1) an overall project plan and (2) a description of the tasks and general schedule that pertain to the person from their organization. In the meeting be precise as to what attributes you are seeking and why these are important. Encourage them to suggest names of people from their organization as candidates. If they ask you if you have any one in mind, you might say, “Well, I would like Joan Stow, but I know how critical her work is to you. How about part of her time and someone else?” If the conversation goes this way, then you may be able to cut a deal then and there. If you do, make sure that you, and not the manager, put it in writing immediately after the meeting as a memorandum of understanding. This will save time later. By the way, the person you are requesting should get a copy of the letter.

If, on the other hand, the meeting is not leading anywhere in terms of closure, you should terminate the meeting with the understanding that you will return in a few days to discuss it again. This will show persistence. You are willing to come back every day to get this resolved.

Our final suggestion here in the end is take what you are offered and make the best of it. How they arrived on the team should not affect their tasks and how they are treated in the project. If you give the impression that they were mandated on the project, the team will pick this up. The result may be a crippled project at the start.

Getting Bit Players—The Casting Call

You may have additional needs that are less than full or even substantial part time. Line up the type of people you need by project phase. Our suggestion from our experience is to staff for two phases ahead. Further out, there is too much uncertainty in terms of effort and schedule. Although the process of getting these people is generally the same, there are some differences.

1. You want specific skills or knowledge so that is the focus of your search.
2. Be clear that the position is not full time and that there is no possibility of your using on the project.
3. Do not raise the expectations as to rewards. Bit players are not rewarded well. It is part of their job and compensation. Like hired guns in the Wild West.

TIME ON THE PROJECT

Traditional project management assumed that people were assigned to the project indefinitely and full time. This is a luxury we can no longer
afford. Plan at the start of a project on what criteria you will use to release resources. Examples of criteria are:

- Elapsed time on the project
- Completion of work
- Turnover of work
- Requirements for their time from higher priority projects

YOUR FIRST MEETING WITH INDIVIDUAL TEAM MEMBERS

A team member has been identified through some means. Let's face reality. The person is likely to be nervous. They will have some real concerns and questions. Here are some we have encountered:

- What is expected of them?
- What is the project environment?
- What will happen to them after the project is over?
- Why were they chosen?
- What will happen to their old work?
- Will they learn new skills?
- How will the project help their career?

You have to address all of these concerns. Even if they do not voice these questions.

Let's go through the meeting. First, it should be in their office. You want to get the lay of the land. What is out on their desk? What are they working on? You sit down. Start right in. Give some reading materials to them to review after you leave. This should consist of the same materials that you provided their manager. You might also add any details on their tasks and information on tools and methods. Now it is time for your presentation. Start with the project overview. Then zoom in on their tasks. Explain why their work will be important to the project. Go into why they were chosen. Explain what skills they have that you value. Discuss the methods and tools. This detailed discussion will help ease any concerns. With that anxiety relieved, move back to the project as a whole. Go over the schedule, problems, and pressures. They will begin to feel that they are a part of the project.

To summarize, here is a list of items you might consider for your meeting:

1. Objectives of the project
2. Background and history
3. Structure of the project
4. Project milestones
5. Their role
6. Their tasks
7. Their milestones
8. Organizations involved in the project
9. Challenges and issues
10. Methods in use
11. Tools in use
12. Why they were selected
13. Expectations of work
14. Their schedule
15. Evaluation of their work
16. Process for handling issues
17. Status and monitoring process
18. What the project can contribute to their career
19. Criteria for release from the project

Now that they understand the project in general and their tasks in particular, you are ready to move on to the controls and reporting of the project. Discuss how the project is being managed. Discuss the other team members and their roles. Cover how issues will be discussed and addressed. You want to empower the person and encourage them to be accountable for their detailed tasks. Get them to start planning their work.

Set up a time for the next individual meeting with them. At the second meeting you will go over any questions. You will also develop the schedule for their tasks with them. Schedule this meeting only a few days after the first meeting.

YOUR FIRST TEAM MEETING

You have the team identified and on board, but they have not assembled as a team. The first meeting is a big event in the project, but you should not treat it that way. It may give false signs or raise expectations. In this first meeting, you are trying to accomplish several goals:

• Have them meet each other in the context of the project.
• Repeat briefly the objectives and scope of the project.
• Describe the general schedule.
• Go over some initial issues.
• Discuss the methods and tools.
• Simulate an average meeting to show them what future meetings will be like.

Keep the meeting short—less than one hour. Select a location that will be typical for the project later. Do not have coffee, food, or other distractions. Begin with an introduction in which you indicate what each person's role is. Let them describe their background in their own words. With an agenda for the meeting, present each person with some handouts related to the project, tools, methods, and issues. Get right into the topics. Encourage
questions along the way. Have each identify themselves and describe what their role in the project is—in their own words. You now make the next meeting and later ones easier. You need to get people comfortable with the process and with each other.

KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF NETWORK BASED TOOLS

Team members must be familiar and at ease with the network based software tools that will be used. If necessary, provide not only training and demonstrations, but also guidelines on how they can be used most effectively.

MANAGING THE TEAM

In Chapter 8 we will cover monitoring of the project. Here we will state that our approach is to obtain status information informally from each team member and to use meetings to address issues. As much as possible, you handle problems outside of the meeting, and you simply tell people the results of the resolution and actions. With status out of the way temporarily, we need to address communications within the project team.

Some specific issues are how to convey information, how to address problems and opportunities raised by the team, how to deal with conflict within the team and between the project and functional departments. We will start with getting information out. If you have electronic mail or groupware, start a group under the mail system for the project team. This will be your main public way to get the word out to the team. Alternatively, you can use voice mail and the memo approach. Having set up this system, do not deviate from it.

ADDRESSING PROBLEMS WITHIN THE TEAM

Table 7.1 gives a list of potential problems and opportunities that can arise. Obviously, the list could be infinite so that those on the list are only to be taken as examples and as being representative. Issues can arise directly by someone in or outside the team pointing out a problem. They can be unstated, but we all know that they are there. When you have a problem or issue presented, you should first have it discussed. Do not attempt to deal with it. You are trying to understand it. You are trying to decode the following:

• Symptoms of the problem
• Aspects of the problem itself
• Relation of the problem to the organization
TABLE 7.1 Examples of Problems and Opportunities within the Project Team

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early alert and identification of issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identification of new methods for use in the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identification of new tools for use in the project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflicts between line management and the project over project assignments</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict over specific methods or tools used</td>
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<tr>
<td>Project restructuring opportunities for greater parallel effort</td>
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<tr>
<td>Competition over authority on resolving issues</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict on specific issue solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resurfacing of past issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inability to work together on specific tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Priority conflict among specific tasks</td>
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<tr>
<td>Team member reassignment from project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical illness or vacation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lack of interest in work and project</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sense that project is not going anywhere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagreement over project objective, scope, and strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict over structure of the project</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Parts of the project impacted by the problem
- Impacts if the problem is ignored

Do not attempt to resolve the issue there. Collect the information and then do your own analysis along the lines we will discuss later in the book. In doing the analysis you should solicit ideas from the team. When you have a resolution or need to discuss it in a group, then bring it to a meeting of the team.

Here are several tips. First, run the solution by the team members who will be impacted most. Get their support and understanding. The solution will not take them by surprise when you present it at the meeting. Our second tip is to have them present the solution to the team.

**Conflict within the Team and Externally**

Conflict can be open or an undercurrent in the project team. Our first suggestion is that you learn how to recognize and deal with it. Recognizing it does not mean waiting for open conflict—look for tension and watch body language. Dealing with it does not mean resolution. It may be that the conflict is too deep-seated and will long outlive the project. You are not out to solve organizational conflict; you are there to complete a project.

What is the source of conflict? Much has been written on this in an academic sense. From what we have experienced in real life, some of the major sources are as follows:
1. Money. People are always fighting over money; this is eternal. This is also one of the easier conflicts to address because it tends to be more rational.

2. Priorities. This is conflict over where people spend their time. It is often a symptom of a deeper issue that questions the work of one project in relation to another. In the battle between the functional and project managers, priority is one of key battlegrounds.

3. Schedules. Conflict occurs here in almost all projects. It is the struggle over how long the work will take to be done.

4. Control. This can be control over the project and the role of the project manager. At the heart of this is the authority of the project manager.

5. Procedures and methods. This is an argument over how the work is to be done. This can get very heated and it can question the ability and skills of the team member—just as control issues question the authority of the project manager.

6. Personalities. This is the conflict of personalities in the project team. We have saved the worst for last. Of all of the problems and conflicts, this is the most emotional and has the least to do with the project. If the people involved in the conflict are important, then you have to live with it.

How do you deal with conflict? You need to understand it. Several alternatives are resolution, no action, deferral, and transformation or change of the conflict basis. Deferral and inaction buy time and allow for the situation to sort itself out (or get worse).

One way of dealing with conflict is to impose a solution. In the case of personalities and other conflicts that will exist and outlive the project, we favor an approach where the different points of view are recognized and put on the table. This will serve to minimize the damage and fallout from conflict.

The goal in conflict resolution is not to win. You want the project to win. Therefore, your goal is to minimize the impact of the conflict on the project. You can do this not only by acknowledging the conflict, but also by reorganizing the project so that conflict is kept to a low profile.

When we speak of conflict, a number of different images come to mind. Some think of war; some think of argument. This is normal. What we are seeing is the modifier to conflict—intensity. In order to minimize the impact on the project, we can work on lowering the intensity of the conflict.

But is all conflict to be avoided? Not at all. As a project manager you will have to confront and win conflicts over resources. You don’t have to win every conflict; the project needs to win. Our guidelines come from Caesar’s written records:

• Choose the arena and issue of conflict carefully. If you choose the arena, you are more likely to win.
• Fight a conflict with information and rationality on your side. If you resort to emotion, you will lose.
• Choose issues that are of true importance to the project. If they are important to you and not to the project, be careful. You risk losing a lot. Also, there is a fundamental problem—namely, that your position is not congruent or aligned to the project. You are out of step. Get in line.

Conflict in projects in the 1990s and beyond is natural because the projects tend to have substantial impact on the organization. Expect it and proactively deal with it. Even if this means acknowledging it and then putting it aside.

GETTING MORE OUT OF A TEAM MEMBER

We have indicated that you want to give positive feedback and attention to people who are doing well. What about the flip side? How do you detect and handle problems in performance and motivation? Although this is not a psychology book, we can offer some observations from the past.

1. The first signs of problems will not be in missed schedules and poor work. It will be seen in the member's eyes, facial expressions, voice, and body language. That is why you have to visit them in their offices—to see what is going on.

2. Assuming that you sense a problem, ask about their overall work and tasks—beyond the project. Try to get them to open up. If they do, try to help. Do not run and tell someone what they say. They are taking you into their confidence. The walls have ears. Betray that trust at your peril.

3. Carefully review their tasks to see what you and others can do. You do not want to relieve them of all tasks. But you do want to give them some relief. Our experience is that this act of kindness will be repaid many times later.

What if they are stuck on a technical problem or disagree on a technical approach? Suppose they do not want to admit their lack of knowledge. This is very typical of junior staff on technical projects. They will spin their wheels because they are intimidated by the senior staff. How do you deal with this? Address it before it happens. Early in the project, indicate that it may happen. Then assign a junior person to a senior person for assistance. This goes back to something that most of industry has lost—apprenticeship.

BRINGING IN SOMEONE NEW IN THE MIDDLE OF THE PROJECT

As we have seen in today's projects, there is more turmoil and less stability. This translates into more turnover in the project team. How do
you deal with turnover in general? At the start of the project, indicate that this is what happens and that you hope that there will not be too much. But it will happen.

How do you bring someone new into the project? There are two cases—planned and unplanned. Let’s look at the similarities in the situations. You need to assemble an up-to-date set of materials and give it to them. You need to have the meeting along the lines suggested earlier.

After they are in tune with your explanation, introduce them to the other project team members one at a time. Start with the people that they will be working with closely on tasks. When you introduce them, include the following:

- What skills they have and why they have been chosen
- What they will be working on in terms of tasks
- What the existing team member does and why it is important
- How the two people will be expected to work together

You are trying to build rapport and establish mutual respect between the people. You should assume that the new person is wondering why they are there. The current staff may be thinking that the new person represents a threat to their position. You are trying to head off problems and instill calm. As a project manager, you will see that you spend a lot of time mixing oil and water.

Some additional comments are useful in the case of the person who is being brought on board unexpectedly. They may be coming on board for a number of reasons:

- Their skills are needed.
- They are replacing someone who has left the project.
- They are excess and have been placed in your project.

The last one sounds pretty bad, doesn’t it? It is not. The person probably doesn’t want to be there. You should sit down with them and go over the material we mentioned. You should also acknowledge that this project may not be their first choice. Get it out in the open. Deal with it. Tell them that you insist on performance and being a team player, but that you are sensitive to their feelings. Have them identify for you how they can best be of service. This will get their commitment. After all, you are trying to make the best of a situation on their behalf and on behalf of the project.

You should pave the way for this new person by telling the team members individually about the person and their skills. It goes without saying that you should not mention if they are being placed in the project. Everyone knows anyhow. The rumor mill is faster than electronic mail.

**GETTING RID OF A TEAM MEMBER**

There are times when after counseling and working with a team member you find that they can no longer function as part of the team. You must embark on two parallel efforts.
Dealing with Disaster

- Undertake Damage Control. Move most of their tasks and certainly all critical tasks to others. Or, take them on yourself. In our last chapter, we are thinking of you as a hands-on manager and doer. Not an administrator. If you want to administrate, get out of projects and go into functional, line management.

- Go to Management and Orchestrate a Transition Plan. Do not put pressure on management. They will not appreciate another problem. That is why we said in the last chapter that you need to solve as many problems yourself. Regard appeals to management as the Lone Ranger regarded silver bullets. Use them very sparingly. Assume that the transition will take some time—maybe several months.

What do you do if the person has to remain in the project? Do not regard the situation as lost. View it as a challenge. Try to assign them less important tasks. All projects have unlimited tasks. Use your imagination and creativity.

What do you tell the rest of the team? They probably already know. But they are watching to see how you, as the leader, will handle it. You need to demonstrate style and compassion. They may be wondering if this will happen to them. You should tell them individually. Do not address it in a group unless someone asks. If you do it off-line, individually, then it should not arise. If it does come up, admit that it is being worked out and that you will keep them updated.

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DEALING WITH DISASTER

Let's suppose that a milestone is not reached. Or that the work does not pass acceptance. Assemble the team and go over why it happened, what can be done to recover, and how to prevent it. Do not place blame. It will make matters worse. However, you should shoulder the blame with management and in front of the team. You are the manager. You are accountable. How you respond to crises counts. Anyone can deal with everyday events.

You should also analyze the disaster from different points of view. Look at it from management, the project, the team, and other perspectives. What were the symptoms that you missed? Why didn't you pay attention? Did it happen because you trusted and believed what people said? We all have to trust other people because we cannot do everything ourselves. Do not stop trusting. But take precautions. Look for proof of statements about milestones and progress. This is especially true about progress on tasks. That is another reason why you need to be personally involved in tasks. By getting your hands dirty in the project, you will know more of what is going on in the project.
RESTRUCTURING A TEAM

With the changes in the project and the team, it is probable that the project will have to be restructured. Do not wait until events dictate restructuring. This is a reactive mode. Act quickly enough. England made many mistakes in World War I with commanders in the field. They failed to replace them quickly. Hundreds of thousands of lives were lost as a result.

Tell the team at the start that you will have to restructure the project from time to time. By making fewer major changes on an organized basis, there will be less disruption than reaction or having many, smaller changes.

How should you proceed with restructuring? Begin with the plan and revise it first. Evaluate the methods and tools. Look for a bundle of related changes. As for the team, you should restructure in an orderly way that does not upset current work. Reassignment of tasks and assignment of new tasks should be phased in and not forced immediately.

How do you present the new structure? First, present it to management by stating your objective and strategy. Go into the impact on the budget and schedule, if there is any impact. Most of the time, there will not be a major impact. So, it is likely to be approved. They want you accountable and you are showing how you are dealing with the situation.

Second, you should go through the same presentation with more detail in a team meeting. Be ready to answer any and all questions. It is likely that the team members will bring up issues and questions that you have not considered. Thus, keep the fine details fluid. Accept their input and change the plan within the strategy and objective. In that way, they will accept the changes more readily. When you have the next meeting, go into how you have taken their comments into account.

HAVING FUN

We have given you a number of ideas for handling situations and problems. Now it is important to have some fun, for their sake, for the project, and for you. Here are some ideas:

1. Circulate copies of articles that describe project disasters and problems. Your problems should pale by comparison.
2. Look for cartoons and jokes about projects. Encourage the team to find some. Start circulating them.
3. Develop a body of historical examples from large projects. Refer to these as we have done in this book. These examples will give perspective.
4. In the project, indicate that at least in this age, the project team and manager will not be shot. Dark humor, but it can break the ice sometimes.
TAKING SUGGESTIONS FROM THE TEAM

What do you do with suggestions voiced by the team? First, you should understand and listen to the suggestion. Why is it being made? What is behind it? Why is it being suggested now? A rule that we have lived by is that very little happens in a project randomly. There is a reason that the suggestion is being made at this time.

A second step is to solicit any additional, related suggestions. Having gotten these out on the table, do not respond with answers when they are made. Go away and think about them. What can you do to implement the suggestion? Take a positive view and assume that you want to take action. Do not dismiss it. If you do, there may be no more suggestions. That means trouble and a lack of communications.

REWARDING THE TEAM

We discourage setting up bonuses and rewards. In projects where this was done, the results were counterproductive. People who did not receive a reward feel slighted. People who are rewarded want more and begin to expect it. Good work should be recognized. You should feel free to send a note to the person's manager on how well they did their job. We are assuming that they made an outstanding contribution. If you acknowledge mediocrity, you will end up with a mediocre project.

AN EXAMPLE OF TIME

The role of the clock in the advance of civilization has not been widely known. Development of the clock and time pieces made possible precision down to the hour for work. The word "punctual" came into use. As people wanted personal clocks, clock makers had to design and make smaller components. The manufacturing process was more complex. With this experience, clock makers were called on to make other types of instruments. Ferdinand Berthold in the middle 1700s faced such a problem. Clock making was advanced and the work was more specialized due to miniaturization and the different skills required. Berthold created a project team. What was once a loosely organized project team now became a team of specialists with division of labor. Individual team members were gilders, engravers, finishers, crafters of springs, pendulum makers, polishers, and so on. This example shows how important the organization of the team is in a project.