



The Organization as a

Project Constraint

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Projects, Culture, and Organizations

- Projects succeed or fail depending on the work of the **PROJECT TEAM**.
- A project team is a social group that develops a unique culture with:
 - Norms
 - History
 - Expectations
- A project team exists within a wider social context – the project owning organization.
- The organization and its subunits have characteristics which function as **PROJECT CONSTRAINTS**. They can enable & support, or limit & interfere with, the activities needed to ensure project success.



Cross-Cultural Teams and Conflict

- Each organization or subunit has its own culture and history.
- Upon joining the organization, new members are socialized into the norms of the group including:
 - Expected vs. forbidden behavior,
 - Organizational history and interpretations of events,
 - Expectations / explanations for the behavior of others, including stakeholders and partners belonging to other organizations.

THEREFORE

- Any team that includes members from different organizations or subunits, is a cross-cultural team.
- Cross cultural teams have a high risk of conflict related to the unique cultural features of their organizations, and incompatibilities between them.



Write this on a Rock

Generally, team member behavior is a reflection of a **larger organizational stance** that may be **implied** or **explicit**.



CLUES that there's an organizational conflict (Listen / watch for patterns. . .)

OBIVOUS:

- "You can't trust them."
- "Don't tell them anything, they don't need to know that."
- "They don't know what they want – they always change their minds."
- "They are never satisfied."
- "They never listen."
- "They always _____."

SUBTLE:

- Even small issues are never resolved until management is involved.
- Managers and higher level personnel attend working meetings.
- Whenever there's a crisis, the **BLAME GAME** starts.



Miscommunication Conflicts

- Arise from differences in vocabulary or standard ways of expressing complex concepts.
 - Relatively simple to correct by consciously using feedback loop techniques to manage interference / barriers:
 - Be clear – avoid jargon or explain what each term means.
 - Pay attention – don't interrupt.
 - Keep an open mind; be willing to reassess your position or understanding.
 - Check your understanding of what has been said.
 - Follow up with a discussion summary.



Perceptual / Interpretive Conflicts

- Conflicts arising from fundamental differences in perception and interpretation of the same events, situations, or project components.
 - Conflicts of this type are harder to identify.
 - Use feedback loop techniques and in depth cross-functional brainstorming to surface and define perceptual discrepancies.
 - Negotiate toward resolution.



Structure / Process Conflicts

- Arise from inherent incompatibilities in the structure or process of the organizations / subunits themselves.
 - These are often difficult to correctly identify and resolve.



The Cost of Unresolved Conflict

- The more difficult it is to correctly identify the cause of conflict, the less likely it is to be successfully resolved.
- Repeated unsuccessful resolution attempts result in an escalating cycle of strongly negative interactions between team members.
- If resolution failure continues it will seriously impair the team's ability to fully realize its creative and problem solving potential.
- Negative emotionalism, reactivity, and partnership deterioration is worsened if there's a history of prior conflict between the organizations.



Conflict Resolution: Starting Point

- Understanding that organizational incompatibilities and cultural differences can result in behavior problems and conflict is important because of its implications for successful resolution.

ASSUMPTIONS

- Assume that your team member is committed to the project's success and willing to cooperate with you to achieve it.
- Assume that the problem behavior is a rational response to some contextual factor or organizational reality unknown to you.
- Understand the role of reward and punishment in our choices and be realistic and just in your expectations.



Redefining the Problem

BENEFITS

- The problem is depersonalized.
 - Your attention is redirected from the team member's character or ability, toward your own understanding of the context within which the assigned work must be completed.
- Your locus of control shifts from an EXTERNAL to an INTERNAL focus, empowering you to take positive action.
 - You cannot control another person's behavior or attitude.
 - You CAN improve your knowledge of a team member's organizational culture and context.
- This orientation interrupts the toxic downward spiral of escalating negative feedback and emotional reactivity.



BEST CASE – Mission Accomplished!

- If you are able to correctly identify the cause of the problem behavior,
 - You can initiate dialogue with the person to understand their compliance barriers;
 - You can negotiate a modification that meets your needs and theirs.
- If modification isn't feasible and the team member's organizational or contextual reality affords no flexibility to comply with the project's needs, then:
 - You can devise a strategy to remove the barrier to compliance.



Worst Case I – No Resolution

- If you determine that there is an organization compliance barrier but no resolution is possible:
 - You can note the risk created by the noncompliance and escalate it so that resolution responsibility is owned at a more appropriate organizational level.
 - Even if successful resolution isn't possible you have defused the emotional negativity of future interaction with the team member and salvaged the working relationship.



Worst Case II – Cause Undetermined

- Even if you cannot access sufficient information to determine the exact cause of your team member's noncompliance or problem behavior, your team will still benefit by:
 - The positive attitude you model, and
 - The rational dialogue you initiate.



CONFLICT TYPE I – Process Incompatibility

The requirement that a project process be used that is incompatible with the team member's organizational process results in an unattractive menu of choices:

- Comply with your requirement and be perceived by their management as ignorant or incompetent,
- Redundant work to comply with both processes, or
- Follow their organization's process and ignore the one you've requested.

SUGGESTED RESOLUTION:

- Get formal cross functional management approval of project process documentation.
- Now your team member is not put into the position of unilaterally deciding which process to use.



CONFLICT TYPE II – Conflicting Instructions

- Noncompliance is common with cross functional requests for information. Possible reasons:
 - Damage done by past misuse of such information, or
 - General confidentiality or information management requirements have not been formally lifted for the project.
- The team member is in a no-win situation. In all likelihood he or she will comply with the functional organization's or functional manager's requirement, not yours.

SUGGESTED RESOLUTION:

- Same as Example I. Get formal cross functional management approval for a project-specific information sharing policy.
 - Specify who is entitled to the information, what uses are authorized, and appropriate confidentiality assurances.



CONFLICT TYPE III – Overallocation

- If your team member is assigned to other projects, it may be impossible to meet the requirements for all of them.
- If their manager gives higher priority to another project, this may be a contextual reality you cannot change.

SUGGESTED RESOLUTION:

- Discuss options with your team member. Offer your assistance in documenting the issue and its impact on the project for escalation to management.
- Even if management does not act, your offer of assistance changes the state and meaning of the relationship.
 - People are more likely to go the extra mile for you if they know that you respect their situation and appreciate their efforts.



HOSTILITY to PM: Behavioral Clues

- Some organizational cultures are **inherently hostile** to project management.
 - Generally, team member behavior is a reflection of a **larger organizational stance** that may be **implied** rather than explicit.

OBVIOUS:

- “We don’t need project management.”
- “It’s an unnecessary layer bureaucracy.”
- “I don’t have time to document / attend meetings / _____, I have work to do.” **(REAL WORK)**

SUBTLE, PASSIVE AGGRESSIVE:

- No shows at meetings, AIs incomplete, process ignored, etc.
- Team member tries to hijack your meetings or project role.
- General nonverbal aura of disrespect / disapproval / disinterest.



HOSTILITY to PM: Structural Clues

- Your PM work must be reported in an “admin” or “overhead” category.
- Your job title does not include the words “Project Manager.”
- You are responsible for managing the project team to success, but your formal role description doesn’t reflect that.
- Management / team expects you to do double duty, as both PM and **TECHNICAL LEAD** or **SME**.



The PM as Culture Change Agent

LEAD. Change the culture using your project as your sphere of influence.

- **SHOW**, don't just tell. Model the behavior you want to see.
- **BUILD TRUST** over time.
 - Remember you are building **RELATIONSHIPS** and **CREDIBILITY** to benefit not just yourself, but your entire profession and organization.

WISDOM. Choose your battles based on prioritized team needs.

- Know the exact **BENEFIT TO THE TEAM** of any change you require. Never strive for mere rote conformance to a "PMI-ism" or other process construct.
- If you must **FORCE CHANGE**, be sure that:
 - The benefit justifies the short term relationship cost.
 - You have higher level buy in for the change.
- **HABIT** is powerful – as you earn trust, slip in incremental, informal adjustments that will serve evolving team needs.

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WHAT YOU DO:

**Serve & protect
the team**

DO NOT lose your battles based on prioritized team needs.

SEEK BENEFIT TO THE TEAM of any change you require.
Do not conform to a "PMI-ism" or other process

CHANGE, be sure that:

the short term relationship cost.

is worth the investment for the change.

As you earn trust, slip in incremental, informal changes that serve evolving team needs.

The PM as Culture Change Agent

- LEAD.** Change the culture using your presence.
- **SHOW**, don't just tell. Model the behavior.
 - **BUILD TRUST** over time.
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BENEFIT TO THE TEAM of any change you require.

Require conformance to a "PMI-ism" or other process

WHAT YOU DO:

**Serve & protect
the team**

CHANGE, be sure that:
- You understand the short term relationship cost.
- You have buy-in for the change.
- As you earn trust, slip in incremental, informal changes that serve evolving team needs.

**HOW YOU DO IT:
Strategy
& tactics**



PMBOK and the **Real World**

- **PMBOK:**
 - **Theoretical** (Civil Engineering, Construction Industry)
 - **Tool kit** (Concepts, tools & techniques, vocabulary, roadmap)

- **What Project Management **is NOT**:**
 - A checklist
 - Easy

- **What Project Management **IS**:**
 - **Value-creating**
 - **Challenging**
 - **Rewarding**

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**PM IS
POWERFUL**

