



Project Summary

Working Together For Everyone's Benefit

Background

A very large manufacturer was using new materials and a new business model. As part of the restructuring, Design Engineering created a special group. Their task was to create custom software for use by Design Engineering and fabrication groups throughout their new global supplier network.

Situation

Over several years in a 'program startup' environment, uncontrolled growth in the number of people on the project, departmental responsibility scope creep, and the added burden of geographic separation, much confusion was apparent. The relationships between the programming group, program management, Engineering, and fabrication had deteriorated. In addition, integrating many social cultures endemic with world-wide supply chain added to the atmosphere of frustration.

The fabrication group conducted a large LEAN workshop elsewhere in the company. This workshop generated over two dozen requests for additional computer programming from the engineering software group. However, programmers were fully booked for the next year and management was scheduling future staff reduction.

Analysis

All departments and external partners were setup in silos, each with their own management structure. As the tension of a multi-billion dollar startup project increased, the work environment became highly charged and very emotional. To overcome the tension, communication between each silo became more formal, and complex. The unspoken intent was for each group to protect themselves from the rest of the organization. This new complexity slowed communication and destroyed the 'team' atmosphere the company was trying to foster. Accusations of nonsupport and undocumented performance requirements surfaced in high-level management meetings.

Action

The Engineering programming group introduced a unique working meeting structure. The Lead Engineering Architect and a Program Engineer were coached in using facilitation skills to replace the usual confrontation and opinion arguments normally used in the organization.

Subject matter experts from various and effected Engineering groups gathered in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and meaning. The meeting focus was to validate incoming programming requests and provide sufficient requirement descriptions to guide the entire fulfillment process.

Early participants (previous skeptics) became advocates and encouraged peers to attend.

"You really need to try the workshop, they are very good at what they do."

...Terry Meyrs,
Change Mgmt. Systems
Engineering



Dave Nave
& Associates



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Results

During a single meeting most programming requests were addressed. Two thirds were cancelled or redirected. Several were consolidated, with three requests negotiated for acceptance by programming.

Indirect benefit: Many groups had never met face-to-face to learn how each other conducted business or to define a problem using a structured approach. New understandings emerged during the discussions, and several long-term collaborative relationships were established.

Take Away

During the time of high emotional pressure, great benefit can be found from stepping outside of the day-to-day hassles. Find a way to open communication between department silos. Respect people's time and appreciate their contribution. Focus on working together for the mutual benefit of all.

Tools and Techniques

Create a working meeting structure. Subject matter experts from various groups gathered to validate assumptions and provide sufficient requirement description to guide resolution.

Meeting material includes pre-workshop and workshop plan, details on agenda items, and facilitation guidelines. Topics to cover include:

- Define requirements: what is the problem – not symptoms, and why is it a problem
- Define issues: what the solution will do – direct and non-direct
- Define justification/benefits (measurable units from business perspective)
- Identify Risks – with solution and/or with no solution
- Map current process
 - Define scope of map
 - Define input & output criteria
 - Define process activities and relationships
- Record action items – with assignees

