

Understanding Team Cohesion For Building High-Performance Teams

by Mike Martin



Have you ever witnessed a sporting event where two teams were involved in a competition and somehow the underdog miraculously defeated the overwhelming favorite? Debates often follow the event about how the team with the best players could lose to a team that shouldn't even be on the same playing field. For whatever reasons, though, not only were the underdogs on the same playing field, but they played to a level equal to or above that of the superior team and WON.

What makes a team perform at a level higher than expected based on the skill sets of each individual player? Many attribute this phenomenon to karma or momentum or just plain old "lady luck." During my athletic career, I had the fortune (or misfortune) to be on both types of teams. The one common denominator I observed both as a spectator and as a player is that the winning team had a common goal or objective, which was shared by each individual on the team. This common goal generated a synergy that helped the players perform at a level well above their individual abilities.

Project managers face the challenge of pulling together a diverse group of individuals and trying to form them into a cohesive unit on each new project. Often, project manag-

ers don't have any say about who gets assigned to work on their project. This is particularly true in weak and balanced matrix organizations. If a project is deemed to have a medium or low priority, the project manager may get any resources that are currently available within the functional silos of the organization. On the other hand, if a project is deemed to have a high priority, the project manager may be fortunate enough to have the brightest and most experienced individuals within the organization assigned to the project. Regardless of the individuals assigned, however, if a common objective isn't communicated and understood by the team, then the probability of the

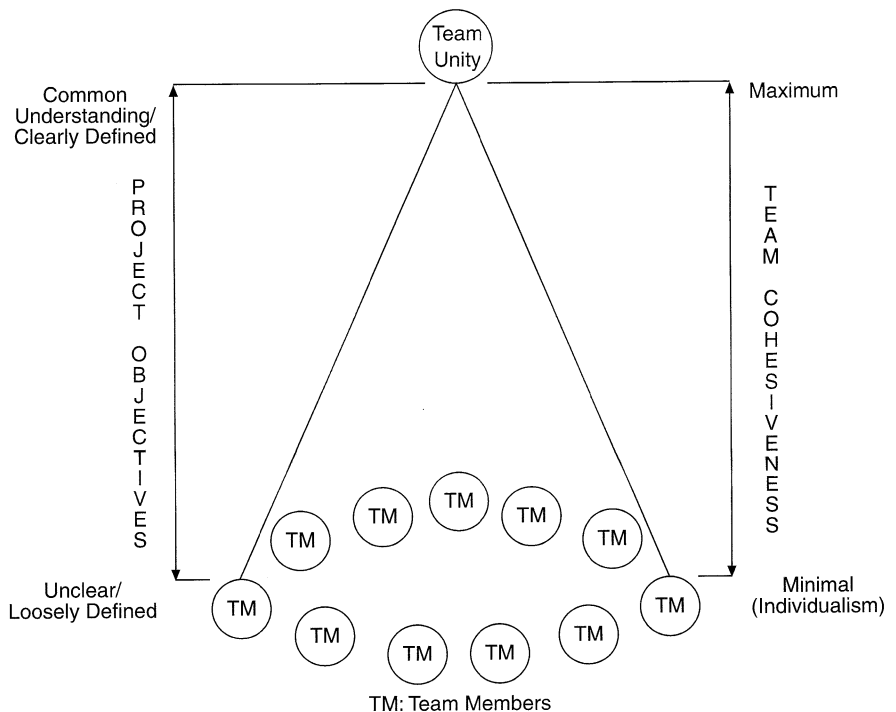
team pulling together and successfully completing the project is greatly diminished.

To illustrate the importance of clearly defining and communicating the objectives of a project, I have developed what I call Martin's Cone of Team Cohesion (see figure). The diagram visually illustrates that as the objectives of the project are better defined and understood, the more cohesive the individual members will be in forming a high-performing team.

When the team is first pulled together, the project objectives may

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Martin's Cone of Team Cohesion



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Managing Your Customer's Expectations for Mutual Success

by Ann Bundy



Are you tired of trying to manage projects for customers who don't know what they want? Then it's time for you to take charge of your destiny by practicing the art of managing your customer's expectations.

Managing your customer's expectations—whether the customer is internal or external—can provide the following benefits:

- Improved customer satisfaction
- Increased profitability
- Higher quality outputs
- Reduced cycle time

So how do you do it? The process you can use to achieve repeatable success includes collaborating with your customer to generate the following:

- List of the customer's expected outcomes from the project
- Is/is not lists to clarify boundary conditions for each outcome
- Importance matrix to focus on potential tradeoffs among the schedule, scope, and resources targets
- Issue log to track ongoing issues

In the perfect world (where none of us lives), you would ask your customers for all of the above and they would hand them to you with a big smile. Reality dictates, however, that you have to actively facilitate this process by offering choices that capture their point of view and terminology, not yours.

As an example, a semiconductor company interested in hosting a project management symposium published a Request for Proposals (RFP) for four hour-long courses. The RFP provided very limited details. In a teleconference, I indicated how important it was for us to understand their expectations and asked for a list of their anticipated outcomes. I then asked the customer to spend some time reviewing with me each deliverable and generating a list of what the deliverable would contain—and what it would not.

It was critical to the customer, for instance, that the course outline be less than half a page, be in Word 7.0 format, be submitted electronically, and not contain any graphics or traditional sales pitches. We discussed the importance of the timeliness of this deliverable in view of the lead-time involved in producing their project management catalog. This discussion raised the issue of tradeoffs, and it was clear that the customer's top priority was meeting the target date, with some flexibility around the costs and scope.

I am happy to report that we were selected to deliver two courses at the symposium, and received very favorable feedback from the customer. Had we not pushed hard to understand the customer's true expectations, however, we might not have even gotten the opportunity in the first place.

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not be clearly defined; at this stage, the team members are unclear about what their roles and responsibilities will be. The team is often unstable, in chaos, and performing below its potential. The project manager plays a critical role at this stage in ensuring that his or her team clearly understands the objectives to be accomplished and that each individual understands his or her role and responsibilities on the project. If this guidance is not provided, the team will remain at the lower level of the cone and never realize its full potential.

As the objectives of the project become more clearly defined and understood, the team starts to gel and come together as a cohesive unit (i.e., team unity). Once the team has a common goal and the members become focused on reaching that goal, their potential to succeed increases exponentially. It's this type of cohesiveness that forms the foundation for high-performance teams.

So it's not karma or momentum or luck that makes high-performance teams. Instead, this level of performance can be achieved by simply establishing and communicating a common goal and objectives for the team to accomplish and ensuring that the team members stay focused. This simple step can help your team achieve a level of performance never achieved before within your organization. So, the next time you're charged with pulling together a diverse group of individuals to carry out a project, remember to use Martin's Cone of Team Cohesion as a guide for helping build your high-performance team.

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