Managing team entrees and withdrawals during the project life cycle ☆

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Abstract

A well-known PM axiom is that the composition of project teams must reflect the needs of the projects. Such needs typically change over the course of the project. Moreover, project members may enter or withdraw from projects due to 'natural' causes. Projects thus undergo shifts in terms of the composition of teams during the project life cycle. This paper focuses on managerial challenges related to the complexity and multitude of entry into – and withdrawal from projects on the basis of a single case study. This case study and a literature study are employed to identify issues and, henceforward, managerial tasks that project managers ought to be especially aware of. Drawing on these managerial tasks, we advocate that the project manager ought to handle transitions in the composition of the project team. Furthermore, we suggest that (s)he introduces rites marking such transitions. Finally, we advocate the appointment of a formal mentor to assist new team members in becoming acquainted with the project.
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1. Introduction

Within the project management literature, we traditionally perceive a project as an organisational form, the purpose of which is to complete a more or less well-defined task. Moreover, we customarily define the primary reason for choosing this organisational form as being that a strong task orientation, a visible organisation, and clear objectives might focus the attention of actors, thereby possibly resulting in improved performance [1]. A central feature of the project form is that the task is to be completed by a temporary team. This team is to be compromised of members who may be quite different and who may not know one another beforehand. It is commonly accepted that working in temporary teams poses serious challenges to team members who are expected to function in new roles with new tasks and in an unfamiliar context [1]. As time is a critical resource in most projects, it is therefore crucial that cooperation within the project team functions as early as possible in the project life cycle.

Within the PM and the organisational behaviour disciplines, a major stream of research, e.g. [2–8] focuses on the team concept of teams. The team concept is defined in multiple ways within this stream of research; however, one commonly used definition is that a team is "a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable" [5, p. 45]. Team building is, according to Beyer and Trice [9, p. 16], "justified by the belief that there is a family-life bond within working groups that

can be used for the company's benefit''. Researchers also appear to agree that teams and teambuilding are of such importance that a key task for the project manager is to create the prerequisites for enhancing successful cooperation within the project or, in other words, to ensure that cohesiveness prevails within the team.

According to Bowditch and Bouno [3], the concept of cohesiveness refers to the degree to which project members wish to remain in the project team and the strength of their commitment to the team and its goals. As a result, degrees of cohesiveness may determine whether a group of people can be considered to be a team or 'merely' a working group. Within the PM discipline, a classic assumption is that a cohesive project team will perform considerably better than a group with a low degree of cohesiveness. A project team in which the members experience feelings of closeness, manifested in similar views, attitudes, liking, performance and/or behaviour [3] will, other things being equal, thus outperform project groups characterised by differences in views, attitudes, likings, performance, and/or behaviour. Nevertheless, it is important that the members focus on accomplishing the project objectives rather than focusing on developing social behaviours and interactions solely dealing with maintaining group membership. In this paper, we will not question the assumption that a cohesive team performs better than a non-cohesive team. Thus, we assume cohesiveness to be a means to an end (i.e., achieving higher levels of project performance); however, cohesiveness is by no means static. Instead, ''social cohesion is suggested to be a continually changeable state'' and further, ''group members may direct more of their energies toward sustaining those relationships that are important to them'' [3, p. 139]. Cohesiveness is thus closely related to the development of project teams.

A classic means of conceptualising team development is to regard it as a process comprised of distinctive stages. In Table 1, a number of conceptualisations of team development processes are reproduced.

A key feature identifiable in all models reproduced in Table 1 is that individual team members might experience high degrees of uncertainty relating to goals, tasks, roles, collaboration, norms, rules, and procedures in the initial stages. Moreover, all of the process models indicate that such uncertainties are reduced as team development moves towards later stages of the process. Thus, an assumption underlying most – if not all – process models of team development is that project teams initially require some time to establish roles, loyalty, trust, rules, communication, and a sense of belonging. In order to facilitate these critical elements, the PM literature offers normative advice of a more specific nature. For example, the literature suggests that goals ought to be well-defined [10]; project start-up should be proactive [11]; the project should be grounded in a vision [12]; borders are to be introduced [13]; mapping ought to be done by rhetoric [13]; and appropriate channels of communication should be established [14].

All of the normative suggestions mentioned in the above concern the initial formation of the project group (i.e., during project start-up); however, the composition of project teams is not static by nature. To the contrary, project teams seldom undergo the entire project life cycle unchanged. One of the key axioms within the PM literature [1] is that team composition ought to reflect the actual needs of the project at a specific point in time. Thus, project team compositions vary during the project life cycle due to the fact that additional human resources and competencies may be required, while other resources and competencies are no longer requested. In other words, project team composition changes in accordance with the changing nature of the project itself through its life cycle. Supplementary to changes generated by the project task, changes transpire due to (natural) member turnover; altered priorities in the manning of the permanent organisation to which the project belongs, etc. In fact, changes in the composition of the project team might actually benefit the project as new project team members, in addition to required resources and competencies, bring new insight to the project, thereby possibly challenging the project inertia [6]. On the other hand, changes in team composition may damage the project and the feeling of cohesiveness quite severely, as team members spend excessive time and resources on team development at the expense of 'actual' project work.

Table 1
Stages in team development (our translation)

Tuckman and Jensen [18]	Woodcock [8]	Lundin and Söderholm [13]	Maylor [19]	Lenneér-Axelson and Thylefors [6]
Forming	The undeveloped team	The action-based entrepreneurialism	Collection	Introduction
Storming	The experimenting team	Fragmentation of commitment-building	Entrenchment	Honeymoon
Norming	The consolidating team	Planned isolation	Resolution/accommodation	Integration
Performing	The mature team	Institutionalised termination	Synergy	Conflicts
			Decline	Maturity
			Break-up	Phasing out

Unfortunately, extant PM literature does not provide sufficient knowledge concerning the problems related to changes in the composition of the team during the project life cycle. As a result, the purpose of the empirical study upon which this paper draws is to gain insight into the problems caused by changes in the composition of the project team. The paper places particular focus on problems experienced by team members. Hence, the paper focuses on one aspect of project teams not otherwise properly addressed in the literature, i.e., the fact that project team compositions *change* during the project life cycle.

2. The case

In order to investigate changes in project team compositions (i.e., entrees into, and withdrawals from, projects) and the effects of such activities on the project team and on project work in particular, this paper draws upon a single, critical case study. More specifically, we draw on an empirical study [15] of a complex, major construction project, entitled AVV2. The purpose of this project was to build an extra block in a power plant. The project was undertaken by SK Energi Ltd., a Danish energy company. The budget was a total of Danish Kroner 3.4 billion (in 1998) ($\approx$453 mio. Euro).

The researchers selected the critical case on the grounds that the unique course of the project ought to be of special value when focusing on phenomena related to team entrees and withdrawals during the project life cycle. Hence, the primary criterion underlying the choice of the critical case was that the project was characterised by a prolonged lifespan as well as a lengthy, temporary shut-down period. Major alterations in the composition of the project team (especially in the re-opening period of the project) thus appear to characterise this specific project. We elaborate on the nature of the critical case in the following paragraphs.

The start-up phase of the project involved 7–8 persons creating a project sketch. On the basis of this sketch, the project got underway and more people became involved. At this point in time, however, a critical government approval was not obtained and the project was therefore immediately shut down and project members either left the company or were (intra-organisationally) reallocated. One-and-a-half years later, a revised project started; however, an important consequence of the shutdown period was major alterations in the project team, as many 'old' members were not re-hired and several new team members entered the project. At the time of data collection (i.e., after the start-up of the revised project), the project team consisted of 38 people. Furthermore, only the PM and one project team member had been involved

in the project from its first start. Others became involved in the project around the time of the restart phase, and others had entered the project gradually over time. Team members were employed in the project on a fulltime basis. The project team members were placed in a few big, open offices on the same floor in the SK Energi Ltd. building. One reason for this arrangement was the ease of practical issues (to facilitate the communication and storage of information, etc.). Another reason was the wish to create 'team cohesiveness'.

In practice, the study was conducted as a single-case study and included interviews with 13 of the 38 project team members at one specific point in the project life cycle (i.e., in the period after the shutdown of the original project and start of the revised one). Informants were selected in order to maximise heterogeneity in key characteristics (i.e., longitude of attachment to the project, experience in relation to projects, age, gender, and educational/work background). Moreover, the researchers relied on sources of written evidence (e.g., project sketch plan, project handbook, etc.) in order to supplement the in-depth interviews. Drawing on the characteristics of the single case study accounted for in this section, we thus suggest that the case represents a unique opportunity in relation to the investigation of changes in team composition and the effects hereof.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to interview the team members who had left the project. The problems concerning withdrawals are therefore only seen from the perspective of the remaining team members. Furthermore, one might argue that a longitudinal study would prove superior in relation to ambitions to investigate activities such as project team entrees and withdrawals and the effects hereof on project teams and project work. Unfortunately, it was not possible for the researcher to lengthen access to the critical case and thus, we take the liberty to discuss entrees and withdrawals (and the effects hereof) on the basis of informants' perceptions and retrospective reporting of such entities. Consequently, we acknowledge deficits attributable to the design of the study in so far retrospective reporting and reliance on informants' perceptions of past and present activities are concerned. Simultaneously, however, we advocate that reliance on documents accounting for the past of the project as well as the choice of informants (and especially deliberate variation across informants included in the study on the basis of characteristics such as the longitude of attachment to the project; project-related experience in general; age; gender; and educational/work background) offset the problems of relying on retrospective reporting, etc., to an extent rendering it viable to discuss the focal phenomena on the basis of an empirical study that is *not* longitudinal in nature. In the following section, we

account for the primary findings of the single (critical) case study.

3. Empirical findings

Drawing on the empirical study, we present the problems and challenges encountered by team members in this section. According to the informants, upon which our analysis primarily draws, such problems and challenges fall in five different categories: first, some challenges and problems relate to the heterogeneity among the new project participants; second, problems and challenges relate to introduction processes for 'new entrees' (i.e., project team members new to both the parent organisation and the project at hand) and 'old entrees' (i.e., participants recruited from within the permanent organisation), respectively; third, problems and challenges relate to knowledge transfer and especially to the fact that knowledge transfer primarily relies on entrees' initiation of such transfers; fourth, challenges and problems seem to greatly relate to requests from 'extant' project team members for the 'reinforcement of the identity of the project'; and finally, a separate line of challenges and problems appears to emerge in relation to the different types of withdrawals the project is subject to. In the following sections, we elaborate on these five sets of problems and challenges.

4. The backgrounds/characteristics of the new project participants

One of the major findings was that people entering the project (i.e., referred to as 'entrees' in the following sections of the paper) were quite heterogeneous in terms of a number of different characteristics. They differed particularly in the manner in which they were recruited for the project; their knowledge about this particular type of projects; and whether they knew some of the other team members beforehand.

Some of the entrees were hired 'especially' for this project. They were therefore new to the permanent organisation as well (we refer to these people as 'new entrees' in the following sections). Furthermore, the group of new entrees included both people who had just completed their education and others who had experiences from similar projects in other companies. However, some experienced Swedish team members did not have experience with 'the Danish way' of dealing with external partners (which follows multi-contracting principles) and hence, even some of the more experienced entrees were highly inexperienced in relation to some aspects of the focal project.

Some 'new entrees' were hired through advertisements in the newspapers, while others were head-hunted more directly for the project. Also, current team members had informed some entrees on vacant positions in the project. Other entrees were recruited from within the permanent organisation (referred to as 'old entrees' in the following sections). Some of these 'old entrees' had experiences from similar projects, while others did not. Some of the 'new' and 'old' entrees had heard extensively about the project beforehand; others knew nothing at all before entering the project team. Some were acquainted with a couple of the team members beforehand; others knew around half of the group; yet others did not know anybody related to the project at all.

In summary, then, the entrees were characterised by very different backgrounds and experiences. Moreover, they brought different types of resources and competencies to the project. Finally, they varied in terms of their knowledge regarding the project and the team. Consequently, the only thing that they had in common was that they were 'new' to the project. Henceforward, a key implication appears to be that the entrees had very different needs regarding their introduction and start in the project. The next line of empirical findings elaborates on such implications.

5. The introduction process for a 'new entree'

When a new entree entered the project, he or she underwent the following introduction activities:

- An interview with a superior, i.e., the project manager or a part project manager.
- A conducted tour of the office, the building and the construction site, shaking hands with the other team members (who were well-informed as to the arrival of the new entree).
- Placement at his/her own desk, usually nearby colleagues with similar work tasks.
- The entree received flowers at his/her desk, and the computer and telephone were made ready.
- The entree received a project handbook, a project sketch report, etc.
- The superior briefed the entree on the project status.
- The superior or somebody else introduced the entree to the work tasks.

After these introductory activities, the entree was supposed to start working. The entree was also supposed to actively seek help and information whenever required.

The informants felt that the introduction was very well prepared for. Furthermore, they were quite pleased with the levels of preparation. In connection with other projects, they had sometimes experienced that nobody knew that the entrees were supposed to start the day

they showed up at their new workplace. "Who are you?" and "Oh, was it today you were supposed to start?!" are two (unpleasant) reactions that some of the entrees had experienced in other projects.

Finally, the informants were pleased with the introductory events and activities; especially so, as they preferred getting involved in a rather apprehensive assignment within the first day on the job instead of having to spend the first days getting to know the project and the company, e.g., by reading the project handbook, etc. Consequently, being assigned to apprehensive tasks appears to qualify as a 'first day on the job' that informants appreciate.

6. The introduction process for an 'old entree'

When the entree was recruited from inside SK Energi Ltd. (i.e., intra-organisational recruitment), the introduction process was typically less formal and more diffuse than when entrees were recruited from outside of the parent organisation. The process seems especially diffuse in situations in which the entree was familiar with the project manager and/or the part project manager and some of the team members beforehand. Furthermore, levels of informality and diffuse introduction processes increased in those situations in which the entree still had some obligations in his/her former department or project and, thus, in periods of times in which he/she was only involved in the AVV2-project on a part-time basis.

The team members did not always receive information on the arrival of 'old entrees'. Consequently, these entrees did not receive flowers; nor did they receive complete conducted tours. Typically, 'old entrees' shook hands with a few of the team members (i.e., the group of team members who 'happened to be' present the day the entree was assigned a desk in the project area). Otherwise he or she just started working. The informants provided further examples of situations where a person 'just' showed up and claimed that he/she was a new team member and needed a desk etc.

Although the 'old entrees' did not express any unease in relation to their introductions, members of the project team were frustrated with this type of introduction and explained that they felt uninformed and uncomfortable with the responses expected from them in relation to this type of entree.

7. Entree-driven knowledge transfer

One of the study's other key findings relates to knowledge transfer. With the exception of the oral briefing on the project and the tasks involving the written materials supplied in the introduction, the transfer of project-specific knowledge apparently primarily occurs at the initiative of the entrees themselves. Entrees thus had to become engaged in active information gathering if they wished to obtain project-specific knowledge. Moreover, when entrees were expected to replace withdrawing project members, they did not always receive 'overlapping' periods of time in the project.

In general, although steps were taken in order to transform implicit knowledge into explicit and codified knowledge (e.g., by means of the project handbook) the entrees typically required interpersonal communication to supplement the written materials. While ease of information acquisition was sought through psychical proximity (i.e., entrees were located next to project members working with related topics), entrees generally felt uncomfortable with active information searches; they felt they imposed upon colleagues, whose time and resources were quite scarce. Such feelings of 'imposing' appear to particularly hinge on the fact that nobody in the team was assigned responsibility for knowledge transfer to entrees subsequent to the introduction period.

Furthermore, entrees and team members agreed on the fact that entrees' questions were not always appreciated; such questions occasionally addressed the core elements of the project and the organisational culture of the project team. This was especially true for entrees with project-related experiences, whereas project 'novices' rarely questioned the basic assumptions underlying the project and the culture.

8. Reinforcement of the identity of the project

Informants exhibited strong team spirit. Furthermore, they expressed pride over the feeling of being "The team which builds the AVV2". They also expressed desire for a clear indication as to who was in the team, who entered the project, and who withdrew from the project. Furthermore, several informants requested activities aimed at getting to know one another better. For example, they suggested meeting in their spare time in order to enhance team cohesiveness and their individual job satisfaction.

Elaborating on the comments referred to in the above, the informants pointed to the fact that one could not expect entrees to share the common understanding of the project; nor could one initially expect them to relate to 'the proper way' of working within the project. Consequently, project team members explicated urgency for entrees to become acquainted with the project goals and history, thus enabling them to make the right choices and decisions during the project. Project members thus requested some sort of reinforcement regarding the project identity. As a result, team members placed great value on project seminars and the like in

which goals and working methods were explained to entrees (and reiterated for the rest of the team).

According to the informants, having the same project manager throughout the entire project life cycle was a third way to maintain continuity in the project. Finally, informants pointed out that it might also be wise to listen to the entrees and their suggestions, as they could possibly see the project from new perspectives. This new input ought to be welcomed, even though it should not come at the cost of project productivity. Consequently, it appears as though team members allow to a certain extent for entrees to raise questions directed at underlying assumptions (although they do not appreciate entrees questioning such underlying assumptions beyond that level).

9. Different types of withdrawals

A final finding of the study was that the manner in which the withdrawals from the project took place greatly influenced the performance of the remaining team. Normally, withdrawals involved the 'withdrawee' talking to the project manager as well as an agreement between these two parties on how exactly withdrawal was to take place. On the basis of this agreement, the withdrawee typically informed co-workers of their withdrawal and held some kind of parting reception. However, people occasionally left the project with very short notice. In such situations, withdrawal was somewhat hectic. For example, many informants referred to a situation in which the withdrawee packed his things during the lunch-break and, after lunch, project members were told that the person in question would leave the project in the afternoon. Apart from the team members' unease about the whole incident, the team members spent a lot of time and energy speculating as to the exact reasons why the member left the project, why management kept a lid on the incident, and what they could have done to prevent the incident from occurring. In sum, informants agreed that this type of withdrawal influenced the performance of the remaining team both negatively and quite dramatically.

10. Unfolding the literature

PM literature has not traditionally paid significant attention to problems associated with changes in the composition of project teams during the project life cycle; however, transitions in teams are expected to affect all team members [6]. Such transitions are thus expected to increase uncertainty concerning roles, norms and communication. In other words, the team might 'fall back' to some of the earlier stages of their group development process due to such transitions. The empirical

study validates this statement; and further, it indicates that such transitions consume time and energy, as well as fuel storytelling [16]. Storytelling refers to a common human attempt to make sense out of the situations that one experiences [17]. In the course of our data collection, we particularly identified one taboo that tied up a great deal of energy and led to several stories. Here, we refer to the situation presented above, where nobody would ask the project manager why one of the team members left the project with short notice and without explanation offered to the remaining team.

In the AVV2-project, the project manager and the project team engaged in several arrangements in order to create and reinforce the identity of the project and to enhance team cohesiveness [3]. Furthermore, they actively 'guarded the borders' [13] of the project (the team members were among other things placed at one floor in the building). However, the team members felt that they did not know for sure who were members of the team and who were not. What is more, they felt uncomfortable with this situation.

In the literature on organisational behaviour, Beyer and Trice [9] discuss the concept of rites, defining the purpose of rites as aimed at easing transition. The study reveals that rites were in fact employed in the AVV2-project to explicate entry into – and withdrawal from – the project. For example, an introductory rite underlay the entry of newly hired personnel into the project and receptions are the rite by means of which withdrawals from the project were expressed. However, in some cases (when dealing with 'old entrees'), the introductory rite was not carried out in 'a proper manner', and in at least one example the withdrawal rite was not carried out. The absence of rites clearly created frustration in the team. In sum, the study thus corroborates the claim that entry and withdrawal rites ease transitions in the composition of project teams and further, the study reveals that such rites minimise the effects of transitions on performance.

Furthermore, Beyer and Trice [9] point out the need for maintenance rites during the project lifecycle. Such rites "include a variety of elaborate activities intended to strengthen existing social structures and thus improve their functioning" [9]. In the AVV2-project, the team members expressed desire for such rites, for example seminars where the goals and project history are reiterated and discussed. Such rites are presented in the classical project management literature, e.g. [1]. Consequently, they will not be discussed further in this paper.

11. Implications for project management

Elaborating on the preceding sections, the purpose of this section is to discuss the managerial implications of

entrees and withdrawals during the project life cycle. However, this section only accounts for managerial challenges and tasks imposed on the project manager, whereas this paper does *not* discuss possible challenges and tasks imposed on project owners. Henceforward, this section reflects a 'project manager perspective'.

Due to the heterogeneity of entrees identified in the empirical study, individual introductions appear much required. However, at the same time a need exists for formalised and standardised introductions, thus minimising disturbances to the project. Balancing these two conflicting needs therefore represents a managerial challenge. One means of achieving such balance is to have a standardised basic rite and some flexible additions to that rite. Furthermore, withdrawals pose managerial challenges, primarily as regards the stabilisation of goal-oriented performance. In Table 2, we offer an overview of managerial tasks related to the study's main findings. Each of these tasks is subsequently discussed in greater detail.

As for the first contact between entrees and the project *(the enrolment)*, major managerial challenges seem to be (1) to balance entrees' expectations with those of the project team and the project manager, and (2) inform the team that a new team member will enter the project. Also, due to the fact that (1) entrees are characterised by different backgrounds and competencies, and (2) they differ in their knowledge about the project, the initial contacts between entrees and the project ought to ensure that such balancing is achieved. As a result, and concordant with Mikkelsen and Riis [1], we suggest that the project manager (or possibly somebody else responsible for introduction processes) sets aside time and resources to conduct 'attachment interviews' with entrees. A key objective of such interviews should be to account for the expectations of the project manager and the project team, as well as to discuss the expectations of the entrees in order to balance expectations and henceforward to reach consensus on reasonable expectations.

Regarding actual *entrance*, we advocate that any entry ought to be accompanied by a rite [e.g., an entrance ceremony in 9's terms], the purpose of which is to communicate the entry to all members of the project team. Furthermore, such rites ought to disseminate knowledge to the entree; his/her background and competencies; and the reasons why the entree is expected to represent a valuable addition to the project team. Information about the entrees of value to the project team could thus be disseminated throughout the project team quite easily be means of (some sort of) an entrance rite.

Furthermore, we advocate that ease of entry is accomplished by means of some sort of mentoring. By mentoring we mean guidance regarding the project offered by a person highly knowledgeable on the project. Such mentoring could possibly include an invitation from an established project member to give the entree a tour around the project site; a tour introducing the entree to key project members and/or team members working with closely related topics. Moreover, the mentor should introduce the entree to the ways in which practicalities are arranged (e.g., copying, information storage, and secretarial functions). Further, the mentor should assure that the entree receives written documents (e.g., the project handbook), or at least he/she could ensure that the entree knows where to look for such documents. Finally, above all else the mentor ought to get the entree "started".

Mentoring ought to be structured and formalised because it could reduce entrees' being uncomfortable with active information searches. Moreover, the same procedures should be applied to all entrees regardless of whether they have been newly hired or they are 'old' employees of the parent organisation. The main reason why we advocate standardised procedures is that while entrees might differ in their needs for rites and mentoring, the study suggests that the project team's needs for rites and mentoring do not depend on the status, experiences etc. of the entrees.

Table 2
Managerial tasks regarding ease of entrees and withdrawals

Phase	Time	Main tasks
Enrolment	When the entree is recruited	• Balancing entrees' expectations with those of the project • Informing the team
Entrance	When the entree meets the team for the first time	• Generation and employment of entrance rites • Mentoring
Integration	The first period 'in' the project	• Mentoring to help knowledge transfer to the extent that this is needed by the individual project member • Follow-up
Maintenance	During the project	• Reinforcement of the project identity • Formation of maintenance rites
Withdrawal	When decision on withdrawal is made	• Generation and employment of parting rites • Follow-up in the remaining team

In the period following entry, a strong need exists for entree *integration*. Needs for integration vary among entrees, as some entrees require prolonged periods of time and close collaboration to become an integral part of the project, whereas other entrees (e.g., entrees who are experienced project team members or entrees quite familiar with the work they are expected to do) may request lesser levels of integrative efforts. Furthermore, the length of integration periods depends on whether the entree is expected to replace another team member and, thus, whether he/she is assigned a task to complete or assigned ill-defined tasks. In sum, we advocate that formal mentoring ought to be an integral part of the integration phase to the extent that entrees require such mentoring.

Following entry and integration, there is a subsequent period in which *maintenance* is of critical importance; however, the managerial tasks related to this period are well described in the extant PM literature (see, e.g. [1,12]). As a result, we will refrain from discussing such managerial challenges any further.

Lennéer-Axelson and Thylefors [6] conclude that *withdrawal* from the project may harm the project team, as the team might experience "separation reactions" (i.e., a term covering reactions such as de-motivation, anger, a feeling of powerlessness, relief, envy, confusion, or even sorrow). Drawing on the empirical findings, we advocate that the withdrawals of individual team members from the project are accompanied by parting ceremonies in which the reasons for withdrawal and feelings towards such withdrawal are discussed openly. Besides "cleaning the air", parting ceremonies explicate parting from the project and thus, the new situation imposed on the project team due to the withdrawal. Activities in the parting ceremony could possibly include activities such as speeches, exchanging presents, storytelling, informal discussions about the new job of the departing person, taking pictures, exchanging addresses etc.

Drawing on the empirical study as well as on the managerial implications of these findings (i.e., the tasks listed in Table 2), the key contribution of this paper to extant knowledge on project team changes is that project managers ought to devote special attention to entrees and withdrawals. Project managers should manage entrees and withdrawals particularly due to the fact that – regardless of entrees' or withdrawees' needs (or possible lack thereof) for rites marking entry or withdrawal – the study suggests that the project team needs such rites.

12. Conclusion

In conclusion, the PM literature advocates the development of cohesive teams; such teams perform better than non-cohesive teams. In order to develop cohesive teams, one should realise that all groups undergo different development stages (i.e., forming, norming, storming, performing) and further, one ought to acknowledge that it may be highly time-consuming for teams to go through different stages (once more).

Nonetheless, events within or around the project may induce discontinuity in the completion of the project. Such events may thus alter the composition of the project team quite radically (e.g., the entry of new project team members or 'old' members resigning from the project may change compositions to such extents that it affects project work).

Changes in the composition of the project team appear to affect all team members. Consequently, such changes may even lead to the project team being set back to earlier phases of group development.

However, re-engaging in team development processes may affect performance negatively. The project manager should therefore seek to ease any transition in the composition of the project team.

We specifically advocate that the project manager be conscious as regards managerial challenges associated with each team members' enrolment, entrance, integration, maintenance, and withdrawal. We suggest that formal transition and maintenance rites are introduced and, in particular, that a formal mentor be appointed to help entrees according to their needs. Consequently, the key contribution of this paper to extant knowledge on management of project teams is that it suggests that project managers should not (solely) rely on conventional wisdom regarding stages in team development. Instead, project managers should acknowledge that team composition is *not* static. They should therefore actively manage variations in project team compositions ensuing from team members' withdrawals from, and entrees into, the project at hand.

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