

MANAGEMENT DIGEST

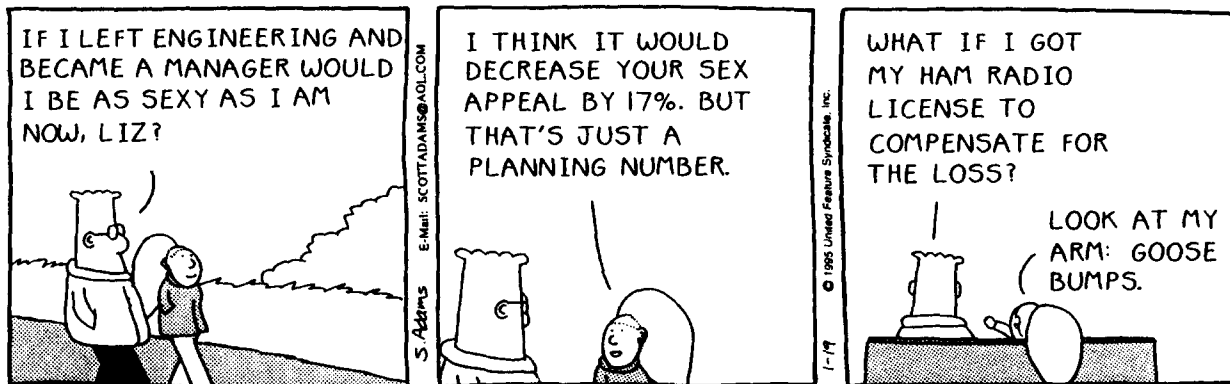
you're doing." The rewards, however, are tremendous: better morale, greater job loyalty, an increased willingness to communicate new ideas and renewed energy for the job at hand.

EFFICIENCY CHALLENGE

Paul Hawken, president of retailer Smith & Hawken, told a New Orleans

convention this year that businesses will need to use resources 100 times more efficiently than they do today to compete in the coming marketplace. A squeeze on the availability of new resources and a growing number of bans against the disposal of other resources means a noticeable shift toward recycling. This means more than collecting used soda pop bottles and turning them into microfleece jackets. It means

engineering ways to reuse water indefinitely. It means constructing office buildings entirely out of recycled materials and then recycling those materials when the building eventually is torn down. More than anything, it means changing our perspective about what we do and how we do it. We are challenged to figure out how we can be more efficient tomorrow, and then begin doing it . . . today.



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PEOPLE SKILLS

Some Myths about Team Dynamics

In the past decade, the number of teams formed to address specific projects, processes or issues has increased dramatically. As teams have grown in number and variety, so have certain assumptions about team dynamics. A brief review of the latest research on team dynamics indicates that some "common wisdom" about teams is based more on myth than reality.

Myth 1: Teams of women are more collaborative than teams of men. Research on 192 diverse teams carried out at the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro,

N.C., showed no relationship between the gender composition of a team and scores on a team unity scale, which measured degrees of collaboration and freedom from conflict. Men and women were equally likely to display the ability to handle conflict and collaborate well. Conversely, they were also equally likely to demonstrate a tendency to handle conflict poorly or to compete with one another in a nonconstructive manner.

Myth 2: Men are better as leaders than women. Women appear to have a slight edge over men in the ability to lead teams effectively.

Research results from the Center for Creative Leadership are tentative but intriguing. The center's team leader profile suggests that women, on average, are slightly more effective in achieving team leadership, as rated by team members. Female leaders were rated slightly higher than male leaders overall.

This research found that female leaders are more likely than males to give the team regular project updates, schedule time to discuss project status and possibilities for improvement, and ensure that teams have enough members to perform important tasks.

PEOPLE SKILLS

However, even though female leaders are more likely to achieve these results, the same research indicates little or no differences in the performances of teams led by different genders. While studies of gender differences in team leadership have yielded mixed results, the topic deserves more research.

Myth 3: Six or seven members constitute an ideal size. According to one study on group size and performance, the ideal team size actually seems to be no more than 10 to 12 members. There have been successful teams with more than a dozen members, but recent research from Dupont indicates that teams deteriorate in quality and productivity when they grow beyond 12 to 14 members. However, team leaders should concentrate more on how many people are needed to get the job done, rather than on ideal group size. Teams with more than 14 members can use subgroups of up to four members to explore specific issues and report back to the larger group.

Myth 4: It is inadvisable to be on more than three teams. While it is difficult to imagine individuals having the time to contribute meaningfully to more than three or four teams simultaneously, some small firms may have project managers leading many different project

teams at once. Work habits, leadership styles, time constraints and group goals determine the ability of individuals to contribute to multiple teams.

Myth 5: People dislike being assigned to teams. Despite grumbling about long meetings, 70% of team members surveyed by the National Computer Systems Group indicated they were happy to be part of their teams. The reason may be that teams provide a sense of community lacking in most individuals' lives today. Members appear to enjoy the high degree of accomplishment that many project teams report, indicating a desire to contribute to a group effort rather than concentrate solely on individual accomplishments.

Myth 6: Team members are of one mind about what is going well or poorly. Research by Glen Hallum and Dave Campbell indicates that team members are rarely of one mind about the functionality of their team. Commonly used terms such as "groupthink" and mob behavior suggest that people who join teams lose the ability to think independently, as if their brains meld into one collective mind. On most teams you are likely to have one person who thinks things are going fine and at least one who is substantially more critical.

Myth 7: Teams are out of touch with how their performance is viewed by outsiders.

Team members and outside observers typically agree about how the team is doing. Looking at the 107 teams for which both member ratings of team performance and outside observer ratings were gathered, one researcher found the correlation between member and observer ratings to be very high. Although members may not be aware of the specific perceptions of outside observers, members and outside observers tend to agree on overall team performance.

Teams are likely to be around for a long time. The complex work engineering firms perform can rarely be done by individuals operating alone. Yet team dynamics can be frustrating. Teams can be expensive to maintain and fraught with problems such as long meetings, poor coordination and personality conflicts. Not all the challenges teams face have been fully researched, but understanding the reality of team function, rather than the myths, can improve team dynamics from the start and assist firms in developing project teams of the highest performance.

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COMMUNICATION

POISE Yourself for Success

Excellent client service does not manifest itself merely in efficiency and technical expertise; it also involves marketing. Every representative of your firm should be "selling" the firm to every client, every day, convincing the customers that you are a "pleasure to do business with." This selling, or marketing, requires the active and in-

tentional use of "people skills." While interpersonal skills may seem irrelevant to an engineering firm, they are the surest means of conveying your firm's core values. People skills, which are just as important as technical skills in clinching new business and earning repeat business, are the key to exceeding client expectations.

All it takes to incorporate marketing into your daily routine is POISE. Adding even a small dosage of POISE to your work with clients, prospects, subcontractors and public officials will enhance your firm's public profile and business development. The elements of POISE are Plan, Organize, Impress, Sell and Engage.