# The Role of Induction and Training in Team Effectiveness

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## Abstract

Anecdotal evidence suggests that throughout project environments there are inadequate induction and training programs for project teams. Resultant issues include poor scope of works and a lack of communication for both project teams and project managers. This research is designed to evaluate why these problems occur and provide direction as to how these can be minimized. The case studies selected for this research have noted failures or issues in relation to project teams providing a service to major clients. The researchers discovered that there was a significant lack of management support for such a program, which cascaded into other areas of concern such as inadequate training, lack of internal processes, and a client lack of confidence to deliver.

**Keywords:** induction; training; team effectiveness


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Analyses of workplaces suggest there are noted failures or issues in relation to project teams providing a service to clients. Issues such as ill-prepared scope of works, inadequate communication, and complacency by both project teams and project managers are evident. These problems often result in conflict with the client and present a false sense of security and confidence perceived by the client. One of the key issues is the inadequacy and lack of induction and training programs of project teams. This impacted on the effectiveness of the team in meeting objectives of a project. For instance, persons appointed to work on a construction site are required to attend an induction and training course prior to commencing work. This practice could be engaged across all project-based businesses to enhance the effectiveness of the team on individual projects.

The objectives of this research were to evaluate an induction and training plan in operation, its effectiveness in relation to a selected project team, and to identify project manager concerns in relation to a project-specific induction and training program and how it could be improved. The research hypothesis claims that if a comprehensive induction and training plan is implemented within a project, then the effectiveness of a project team has the potential to improve.

## Literature Review

There are different types of organization structures within the business environment as outlined by *A Guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge* (*PMBOK® Guide*) (PMI, 1996) ranging from the traditional matrix or line management to full project-style management. Wysocki, Beck, and Crane (2000) support the *PMBOK® Guide* by noting that one of the most common structures is the traditional matrix that consists of staff reporting to functional or line managers. When a project is initiated a project manager is appointed and a project team is identified which is thought to be capable of undertaking the associated tasks of the project. Team members are generally sought from within the company, and in most cases, there is a need to induct and train them in the objectives of the project. Members are appointed in accordance with their knowledge, experience, and ability to work as a team and individually. At the completion of the project, the team will be disbursed and will assume their normal roles under their base functional or line manager within the company. Project team members do not always remain with a team for the duration of the project, and the frequency of member turnover suggests that induction and training programs should be implemented as new projects commence and during their operation.

The *PMBOK® Guide* has emphasized the importance of bringing the team together at the earliest possible stage of the project. Harris and Harris (1996) claim that there can be many benefits, such as more flexibility and adaptability, more timely and balanced decisions, and more rapid management response to market and technology, if a team is established early.

Project team effectiveness is discussed by Walker (2000) who presents a definition of a project team, describing it as "*temporary*." He continues that a project team collates individuals who will contribute to a common goal, and that "... it is a unique group of individuals who are all required to work together in a controlled environment to meet common goals or objectives." As previously noted, this is evident in a typical matrix environment, where individuals will be selected for the project and will return to normal duties upon conclusion of the project. Harris and Harris (1996) explained that teams are effective when they produce outstanding results. For this to happen they must have some responsibility for each other to achieve the desired outcome of the project.

Wysocki, Beck, and Crane (2000) identify that there are characteristics of a team that provide effectiveness, including commitment, shared responsibility, flexibility, trust and mutual support—they describe this as the "hallmark of an effective team"—and open-mindedness. Partington and Harris (1998) claim that "a critical determinant of team performance is the quality of the human resources which make up the team." Project team effectiveness is also somewhat dependent on the project manager, who must display relevant leadership skills to bring out the best of the team (PMI, 1996).

The need to train individuals is supported by Wysocki et al. (2000): "Project teams tend to be self-sufficient, that is, they possess all of the skills needed to achieve their goal. Any skills not present among the team are developed through training." Kerzner (2000) believes that on-the-job training is less effective than formal training. It is explained that this type of training maximizes the risk of forcing team members to make mistakes, which could have serious implications on the project. Therefore could formal or in-house training be the answer to the effectiveness of a project team? Dunn (2001) argues from a different angle that training is often difficult to implement into a project team, as they are brought together quickly, often without the time to accomplish team building that will lead to a mature and effective team. Forsberg, Mooz, and Cotterman (2000) explain that training plays an important part of any project team and contributes significantly to teamwork. The training should be ongoing throughout the life cycle of the project and reviews should be conducted to ensure that objectives are met and that the team is in harmony. Fisher, Rayner, and Belgard (1995) discuss the concept of "just in time training." The idea is to evaluate the areas that require more skills, experience, or knowledge and implement a training program to counteract them. Another potential method of promoting and enhancing training is team meetings. This provides the opportunity for team members to identify issues and offer solutions to resolve them (Fisher, Rayner, & Belgard 1995). Whitfield, Anthony, and Kacmar (1995) support this by claiming that frequent meetings should be held to identify the needs of the project team and opportunities to improve current practices via a change management process.

## Methodology

The following methodology outlines how the investigation will be applied in order to achieve the research objectives. The research relied upon primary data gathered using interviews with team members from two case studies from the same organization. The organization provides project management services to three major financial institutes within Australia.

The first case study relates to a recent deployment program of Automatic Teller Machine (ATM) installations nationally. The program consisted of 50 ATMs to be installed into a chain of franchise premises across Australia. The project manager appointed for this project allegedly encountered an ineffective project team due to lack of support, no defined roles and responsibilities, minimal scope awareness, and lack of project management experience and knowledge.

Case study two relates to a major project initiated by the same institution that involved the procurement of Internet services as a "front-end" service to customers within a branch environment. The purpose of the project was to provide quality customer service to bank clients by providing state-of-the-art technology assistance. This project manager assumed the role of national project manager for the project and relied heavily on experience and knowledge of individual state hierarchies to assist in the delivery of the project. The project was suspended by the financial institution. Issues noted included inadequate individual performances, inability to meet deadlines, lack of experience and knowledge and a general lack of communication including status reporting to the national project manager.

In order to conduct this type of research, extensive preliminary work should be conducted to find out as much information as possible about the topic (Sekaran, 1992). Sekeran continues to outline that some qualitative studies using observational techniques or interviewing as a means of gathering the data are exploratory in nature. When the data reveals a pattern regarding the phenomena of interest, theories are developed and hypothesis formulated for subsequent testing. This type of methodology is good for advancing knowledge through theory building and often is used to ascertain managerial roles and responsibilities.

To establish a range of perceptions, team members were selected from differing hierarchal levels within the case studies. Fink and Kosecoft (1985) explain the types of questions that can be created, providing information such as how to make questions "concrete," to avoid hidden biases, and to avoid getting too personal. In order to gain productive results, there is the need to justify the questions by establishing if the definition of effectiveness has been confirmed, thoughts on the current induction and training, program and how the induction and training program provides effectiveness or to the project teams. This was confirmed by conducting a pilot interview of the questions.

## Results and Discussion

The interviews were divided into two definitive sections: induction and training experiences and induction and training and effectiveness.

The first question within part 1 of the interview was created to establish the thoughts of the respondents in relation to the current induction and training program. Extraordinarily, there were varied responses ranging from that one existed, to needs improvement, to no induction and training program. This was interesting to note, as it portrays the current existence of such a program but that it is not well recognized by certain personnel within the organization.

Following this the question was asked, "What were the weaknesses of the program?" The literature review found authors such as Whitfield, Anthony, and Kacmar (1995), Kerzner (2000) and Dunn (2001) all claiming that a weakness of such a program was the difficulty in implementation due to the projects' time frames. This was also evident across both case studies, as both projects were allocated with little time to properly plan for such a program. The respondents indicated that the project team was appointed due to who was available at the time, and the key focus was to commence the project as soon as possible. This provided inadequate time to induct or train the project team. When the respondents were asked how this could be improved, there was an overwhelming response that commitment from management would enhance the program and subsequent efficiency of the project. Throughout both case studies, management adopted a reactive mode in preference to proactive in that issues were attempted to be resolved as they occurred instead of identifying at an earlier stage the needs of the project team.

All respondents perceive that the initial induction of a project team is critical for the success of the project. Both case studies lacked the initiative of conducting such an induction and this proved to the detriment of the projects from a very early stage. Both the *PMBOK® Guide* (1996) and Harris and Harris (1996) discuss the importance of the initial induction of a project and that this can produce many benefits such as more flexibility and adaptability, more timely and balanced decisions, and more rapid management response to market and technology. Messmer (1999) stated in support that "the project team must have a clear understanding of their project success objectives" and that the induction program could be seen as a bonding session.

In-house training was seen as the most beneficial type of training for the organization. Respondents saw this form of training as the easiest to implement at short notice. However, Dunn (2001) disagrees, claiming that this type of training is often difficult to implement due to the time required to build an effective and mature team.

The question of how often training should be conducted was asked. All respondents were in agreement with the *PMBOK® Guide* (PMI, 1996), claiming that training should be frequent throughout all phases of a project. The *PMBOK® Guide* states that there should be ongoing review and subsequent change management (if required) of the project, which was not evident in the case studies.

When the respondents were asked how appropriate was the induction and training plan, all respondents claimed that it was nonexistent and that it would need improvement to succeed in future projects. Four of the respondents had no influence on the selection of the project team, which contradicts the literature review. Partington and Harris (1998) and Harris and Harris (1996) suggest that "... the quality of the human resources" helps to determine team performance. How appropriate were the project team members to the project and did this contribute to the ineffectiveness of each case study? Although respondents recognized the importance of a skilled, experienced, expert, committed and focused team, there was no opportunity for them to employ this in the case studies. Whitfield, Anthony, and Kacmar (1995) identified this as a project team trait that would lead to increased effectiveness.

Whitfield, Anthony, and Kacmar. (1995) claim that frequent meetings should be held to identify the needs of the project team and opportunities to improve current practices. During the case studies there was little training conducted and this proved to be an issue in delivering the projects. When asked what was lacking from the project team members, respondents provided an array of responses such as no previous exposure, lack of initiative and experience, and lack of communication. Respondents identified the importance of internal processes and procedures to be applied to the case studies; however, it was claimed that these were nonexistent. Smith (1997) underlined the importance of implementing such processes, which would provide the ability to drive the project.

Since this research evolves around effectiveness, the second half of the interviews questioned team effectiveness, including a definition of the term "effectiveness." It was interesting to note the common theme of the responses. Respondents elaborated on keywords such as "achieve," "ability," and "exceed." These were related to factors such as desired results and satisfying or exceeding client expectations. An alternative answer was "the most efficient use of resources." Harris and Harris (1996) provided similar results to the respondents claiming that teams are effective when they produce outstanding results. It is interesting to note the perception of exceeding client expectations. The *PMBOK® Guide* (1996) relates this to the quality component of its manual and explains the difficulty in exceeding client expectations and it instead defines an acceptable level of quality standard to meet client expectations. This raises the question: what is required to exceed customer expectations within the case studies? If effectiveness is dependent on exceeding client expectations, then effectiveness may never be achieved. Also, who measures effectiveness and does the client really know what they expect?

The respondents were asked what characteristics they considered were effective on the project. Answers such as "team members working together," "meeting project goals," and "knowing responsibilities" were common. These responses revolved around the characteristics outlined by Wysocki, Beck, and Crane (2000) earlier.

But how can effectiveness be measured? Because this research study is of a qualitative nature, a numeric result

cannot be applied, but respondents were asked how they would measure effectiveness. The word "performance" triggered similarities from the results of this question. Performance can relate to client expectations, project goals, and achieving the desired outcome of the project. These factors were seen as critical for the performance of both the project and its team members. Another method of measuring effectiveness is the project management triangle of objectives of time, cost, and quality created by Barnes (1985). The basic concept was that time, cost, and quality were the three key objectives of any project and by illustrating this with each objective on a corner of the triangle, a black dot could be moved within the triangle to ascertain what was the preference of the client. Two respondents supported this model by Barnes, emphasizing the critical nature of achieving time, cost, and quality on any given project. The remaining respondents outlined that stakeholder satisfaction was important by meeting objectives with minimum issues and a task that is completed properly.

Questions then referred to the case studies and attempted to draw information on the efficiency of the project teams. Respondents were asked, "How effective was the project team?" One respondent identified a lack of induction on the project and no training throughout the project. The project teams, according to other respondents, also lacked experience and knowledge, and although the scope was completed, there existed a substantial issue with the client. The astute client easily identified the lack of experience and knowledge, and this reflected on the project manager of the project who was constantly under the client's scrutiny.

The following three questions were related to the close-out of the project, asking, "What was learnt?" "What were the positives of the project?" and the "What were the negatives?" What was learnt on the project is an integral part of the project. It was the opportunity to assess the success of the project and identify areas for improvement. Del Rosario (2001) stated an interesting fact: "When you ask if objectives, goals and promised capabilities had been achieved, everyone comes up with a blank ignorant look." This was evident in the case studies due to the lack of experience of some team members. Lessons learned by the respondents indicated that it was a case of "just getting the job done." Roles and responsibilities were defined, objectives were met, and delivery completed; however, there was a lack of quality and cost considerations, and a need to improve the induction process of the project.

The positives of the case studies provided a variety of responses and included items such as team cohesion, learning from mistakes, and the ability to adapt efficiently to scope changes. Also of interest was that the teams in both case studies were able to identify roles and responsibilities of the project and adapt accordingly. Other positives included dedication, enthusiasm, flexibility, and communication. Enthusiasm is often seen as the key to any success, as concurrent with the lack of enthusiasm, there lie other issues such as demotivation and conflict within the team. One respondent noted an incremental improvement on the project, which was created by the introduction of procedures and processes. This enabled the project team to adapt to these processes, which provided an upturn of efficiency. However, this improvement arrived too late, as the project neared completion.

Negatives of the projects included the inability to relate effectively to the client, lack of communication and inexperience. Other negatives derived from the case studies were evident. One respondent saw insufficient planning as an issue. Was this due to no induction on the project? The other respondents repeated the inadequacies of previous answers, including these included inexperience, lack of communication, lack of management time and devotion to team members.

Given these positives and negatives, it is important to learn from them and provide the basis for improvement within the processes of the organization. Given time frames and the need for the organization to progress, this is often difficult. This has been identified by Forsberg, Mooz, and Cotterman (2000) who claim "lessons learned from prior failures and successes are too often neglected." A project debrief would minimize the likelihood of a repeat performance and can be utilized as a form of training and a benchmark for future projects.

The final question provided the respondents the opportunity to suggest how they could improve and maintain the effectiveness of the project team following the induction and training program. The results varied with responses such as ongoing communication and devoting time and dedication to all team members. The need for management support was highlighted and would play an important role in ensuring the success of the program. One respondent identified the requirement of a training manual for all team members. This manual should include all procedures and be used as an important tool for the project. Overall there were many suggestions for improving and maintaining the effectiveness of the project team.

## Conclusion

Key areas identified as requiring further attention were: training methods, project team evaluation, and managerial support.

The hypothesis of this study is supported; if the organization is to achieve project efficiency then careful consideration should be applied to an induction and training program. There is currently a very basic organization induction and training plan and no project-specific induction and training program; hence, the effectiveness of the project team has enormous potential to improve.

One of the main outcomes of this research is the identification of a requirement for managers to demonstrate full support for induction and training programs. The need for more training programs was also evident throughout the case studies, be it as a form of regular meetings or reviews or the opportunity to implement a change management process to enhance the performance of the project team. This may have alleviated a number of issues related to the delivery of the projects.

It was evident that one case study was completed within the stipulated time frame and the other suspended by the

client. However, both case studies could have been improved with regards to cost and quality, had project members been more aware of the project objectives through an induction and training program.

Future research might investigate how appropriate such programs would be to other industries and what effect this has on project teams in achieving a benchmark for time, cost, and quality, the implications of no induction programs, and the cost of induction and training.

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