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Advisory

The Project Manager You Know:
Overcoming Five Dysfunctions
by Almahdy Eltonsy

The Project Manager You Know
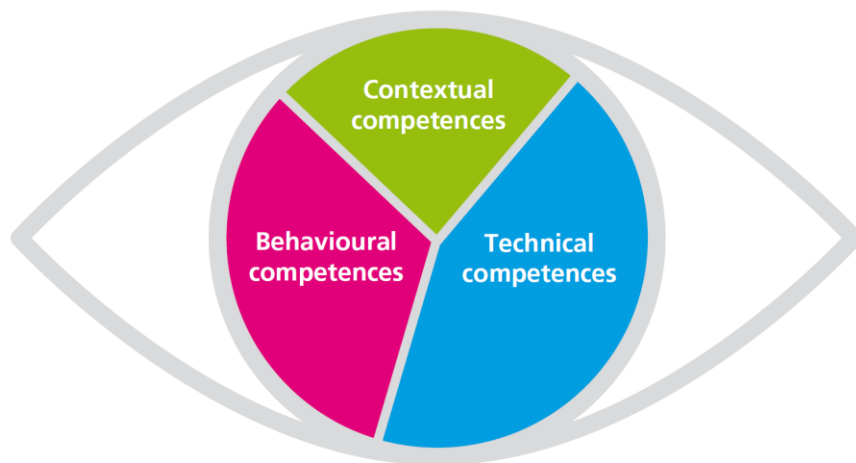## *Overcoming Five Dysfunctions*

By Almahdy Eltonsy

Project management is an art based on a core knowledge, as projects manager we all faced many situations that we wonder and say: ***"How I did that?? "***.

The series of articles aim is to share what we tested many times in our daily work and life, we need to put a name over it.
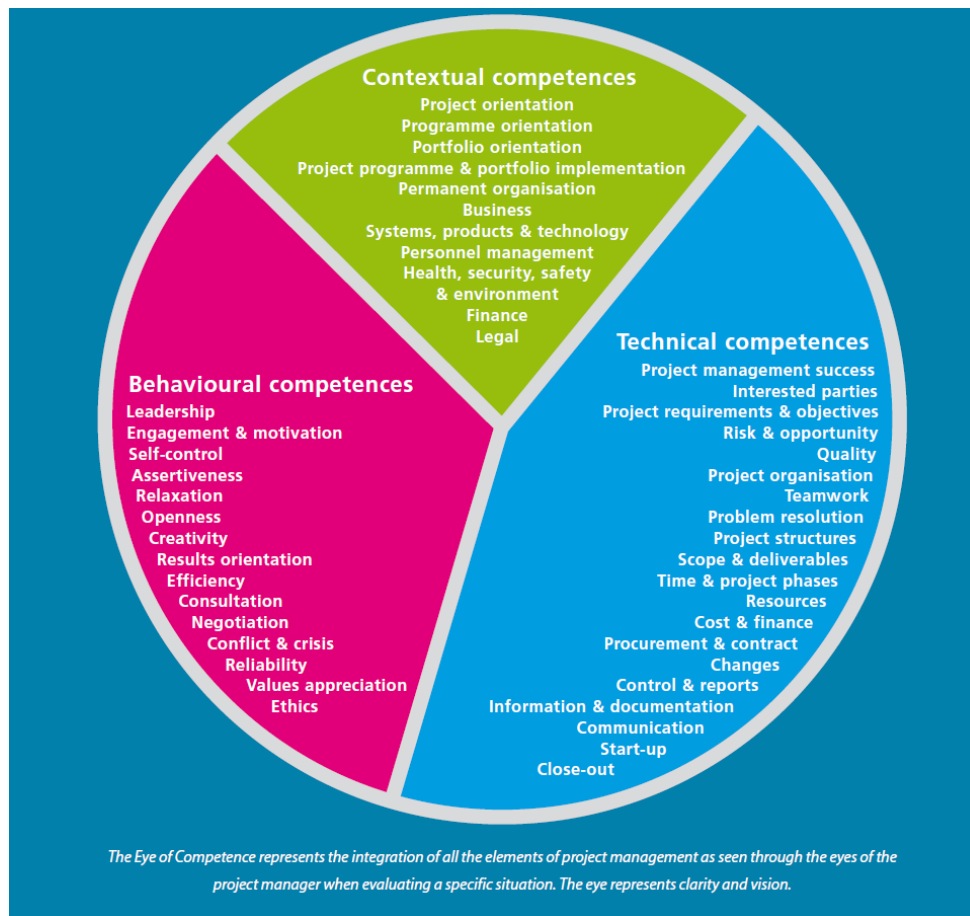
My article(s) based on the ICB (IPMA Competence Baseline) linking it to real situations.

First, the ICB divides the competencies into 3 categories as shown.

The Eye of Competence

The details of the competencies are as follow:

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The Eye of Competence represents the integration of all the elements of project management as seen through the eyes of the project manager when evaluating a specific situation. The eye represents clarity and vision.

Teamwork

First I would like to review what is mentioned in ICB V3.0:

- Projects are performed by teams of people, who are usually brought together specifically for the purpose of the project.
- Teamwork covers the management and leadership of team building, operating in teams and group dynamics.
- ***Teams are groups of people who work together to realise specific objectives.***

Project team building is often done by the use of project start-up meetings, workshops and seminars that may include the project manager, team members and sometimes other interested parties.

Team spirit (i.e. getting people to work well together) can be achieved through *individual motivation*, *team goal setting*, *social events* and *supporting strategies*.

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Problems may arise due to technical or economic difficulties or other kinds of stressful situations.

Issues may also arise due to cultural and educational differences, different interests and/or ways working, or members being located great distances apart.

Team development should follow a defined process, for example: forming, storming, norming and performing.

The project manager needs to continually develop the team and its members, from an initial phase of team building, to team working throughout the life of the project, to the conclusion of the project when team members are released to return to their organisational units for re-assignment.

During their time working in the project, the performance of team members should be regularly reviewed by the project manager in consultation with the line manager, and development, coaching and training needs assessed and appropriate action taken.

Where the performance of a team member is below the required standard, remedial action may be necessary.

Possible process steps:

1. Form – develop a common sense of purpose, belonging and commitment.
2. Storm – assign roles, responsibilities and tasks to aid control, decision-making and conflict resolution.
3. Norm – openness in how team members can work together.
4. Perform – develop interdependency to obtain outstanding results.
5. At the conclusion of the project, hand over the project deliverables to the line organisation and disband the team.
6. Document the lessons learnt and apply to future projects.

That what mentioned in the ICB 3.0 about the teams.

The question we are asking all the time:

We have great team members, the best, there are no cultural differences but the team is not performing….. WHY?

Why team is dysfunctional?

I kept asking myself this question for some years, why we failed to have a team.

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Recently I found a great book that I would like to share with you:

The Five Dysfunctions of a Team by Patrick Lencioni

I would like to share with you what I got from this book that was useful for our work as Projects Manager.

The dictionary definition: Projects are a piece of planned work or an activity that is finished over a period of time and intended to achieve a particular purpose.

According to the book, the five dysfunctions are:

- Absence of trust—unwilling to be vulnerable within the group
- Fear of conflict—seeking artificial harmony over constructive passionate debate
- Lack of commitment—feigning buy-in for group decisions creates ambiguity throughout the organization
- Avoidance of accountability—ducking the responsibility to call peers on counterproductive behavior which sets low standard
- Inattention to results—focusing on personal success, status and ego before team success
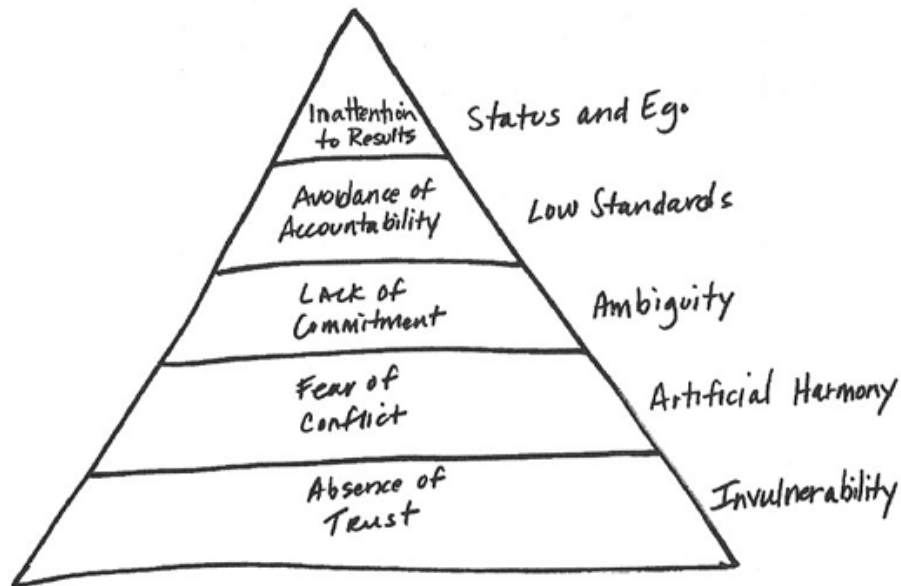
"A functional team must make the collective results of the group more important to each individual than individual members' goals."

"To succeed as a team requires practicing a small set of principles over a long period of time.

"Teams only work when the five dysfunctions described in this book are acknowledged, identified, and overcome."

"Genuine teamwork in most organizations remains as elusive as it has ever been."

"All great relationships, the ones that last over time, require productive conflict in order to grow."

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1. Team success requires great and lasting trust.
2. Trust enables success at dealing with conflict in a way that does not "break" the team.
3. Trust leads to mutual commitment.
4. Trust leads to genuine accountability.
5. For all of this to happen, the leader is critical – truly important. Every team has to have a very good leader.

As a project manager you need to set the tone and culture.

To succeed as a team requires practicing a small set of principles over a period of time.

Teams supposed to only work when the five dysfunctions described are acknowledged, identified, and overcome.

Suggestions for overcoming dysfunction 1

- Personal histories exercise
- Team effectiveness exercise -- team members identify the single most important contribution that each of their peers makes to the team, as well as one area that they must either improve upon or eliminate for the good of the team
- Personality and behavioral preference tools
- 360-degree feedback -- (the author recommends that this be divorced from compensation and formal performance evaluation)
- Experiential team exercises – ropes courses, and other experiential team exercises

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- The role of the leader: demonstrate vulnerability first; genuine, not staged.

Suggestions for overcoming dysfunction 2

Acknowledge that conflict is productive.

- Mining – extract disagreements, call out sensitive issues…
- Real-time permission – openly state, in the heat of the moment, that this conflict is productive; "it is ok, even good, for us to have this conflict…"
- The role of the leader/ Project Manager: practice restraint; allow conflict, and resolution, to occur naturally. (Do not let the {natural} desire to protect members from harm to prematurely interrupt disagreements).

Suggestions for overcoming dysfunction 3

- Recognize the dangers inherent within the desire for consensus and certainty.
- Cascading messaging – leave meetings clearly aligned with one another
- Deadlines – make clear deadlines for when decisions will be made, and honor those deadlines with discipline and rigidity.
- Contingency and worst-case scenario analysis
- Low risk exposure therapy – demonstrate decisiveness in relatively low-risk situations
- The role of the leader: the leader must be comfortable with the prospect of making a decision that ultimately turns out to be wrong.

And the leader must be constantly pushing the group for closure around issues, as well as adherence to schedules that the team has set. What the leader cannot do is place too high a premium on certainty or consensus.

Suggestions for overcoming dysfunction 4

- Accountability refers specifically to the willingness of team members to call their peers on performance or behaviors that might hurt the team.
- Publication of goals and standards – the enemy of accountability is ambiguity
- Simple and regular progress reviews
- Team rewards
- The role of the leader: to encourage and allow the team to serve as the first and primary accountability mechanism. (Sometimes strong leaders naturally create an accountability vacuum within the team, leaving themselves as the only source of discipline).

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Suggestions for overcoming dysfunction 5

- Team status – plenty f teams fall prey to the lure of status.
- Individual status – the familiar tendency of people to focus on enhancing their own positions or career prospects at the expense of the team.
- Recognize that many teams are simply not results focused – they do not live and breathe in order to achieve meaningful objectives, but rather merely to exist or survive.
- Public declaration of results – teams that are willing to commit publicly to specific results are more likely to work with a passionate, even desperate desire to achieve those results.
- Results based rewards – letting someone take home a bonus merely for "trying hard" sends a message that achieving the outcome may not be terribly important after all.

The role of the leader: perhaps more than any of the other dysfunctions, the leader must set the tone for a focus on results. If team members sense that the leader values anything other than results, they will take it as permission to do the same for themselves.

Thanks
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About the Author

Almahdy Eltonsy

Cairo, Egypt

Almahdy Eltonsy, IPMA – B is a Senior Project Manager in the HealthCare industry, and the first healthcare PM granted the IPMA-B certification in Egypt. Starting with Siemens in 1993, Almahdy has extensive technical and managerial experiences, gaining the ability to work cross-functionally in a time-intensive environment. One of the most important milestones in Almahdy's project management career is Children's Cancer Hospital in Egypt (57357) (www.57357.com), a 30 Million Euro Project. As a GPM for this strategic pivotal project, the scope was not only project management but also the service management, in addition to work with accreditation bodies.

In 2012 Almahdy moved to GE HealthCare to work as a product service manager for Surgery – X-Ray – Intervention – Ultrasound – Life Care solutions, using his experience in leading the service team with project management methodology. Almahdy's motive to change is to take a new challenge and exposure to new cultures and discipline, taking advantage of his technical and managerial skills and using the project management tool box in general management aspects.

In addition to his work in healthcare, Almahdy worked as an IT project developer with one of the largest media and advertising groups in Egypt. Almahdy was able to realize a new methodology and software for Media planning and advertising campaign planning. Almahdy holds a B.Sc. in Systems and Biomedical Engineering from Cairo University - Faculty of Engineering, and passed many specialized courses in Siemens, GE and Microsoft. Linkedin: Almahdy Eltonsy. Email: Almahdy_eltonsy@yahoo.com

To view other works by Almahdy Eltonsy, visit his author showcase in the PM World Library at http://pmworldlibrary.net/authors/almahdy-eltonsy/.