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Avoid silo mentality: Six tips for project team diversity

# How doers, analysts, and visionaries excel together

*The content in brief: Successful project professionals bring diversity to their teams - not only content diversity, but also personal diversity. They consciously combine conscientious detail workers, forward-looking creators or creative visionaries. The mix of different personalities makes the project team more dynamic - it also leads to better results. Expert Gunter Gruhser explains six success factors for employee selection in project management.*

Professional knowledge, training certificates, professional experience - the project manager knew exactly which employees he needed for his development project. He carefully examined the qualifications of the candidates who were eligible as team members – to form a hand-picked team of 14 specialists. Then, after two months, the disillusionment: the project was lacking momentum. The specialists were performing their tasks confidently and competently - however the project needed open a spark of liveliness, As everyone kept to their specialty,". The project manager complained, "I was hoping we would get better and more effective results as a team."

Diversity drives projects. A team of professionals looks at tasks from different angles. For example, product development: Designers, programmers, quality managers or production specialists discuss the joint project tasks from their individual points of view. These different perspectives are the catalyst for innovation and new ideas. However, many project managers only think about diversity when it comes to specializations. This is an oversight according to Gunter Gruhser, a senior consultant at next level consulting. "High performing teams not only need the best specialists but also a good

## News-Service

- Ideas & Content for Editors -

mix of different personalities,". This is critical to ignite a fruitful interdisciplinary cooperation.

When selecting project team members, professional project managers choose people in a way that yields a great mix of subject-matter expertise, different personalities, and work preferences. For example, they combine quiet, conscientious detail workers with lively "creators", cooperative team players or creative-emotional visionaries. "This diversity may not make project work easier, but certainly more productive and successful," Gunter Gruhser observed. He lists six tactics for successful project team composition:

### **First tactic: Consciously bring diversity into the team**

Birds of a feather flock together. This also goes for project management. "For example, introvert, factual-analytical project managers often choose similar staff," explains Gunter Gruhser. The problem: the team does not mix well and team cooperation becomes stale. In the worst case, silo mentality prevails. The specialists stick to their specialties, and perform well, but the collaboration falls by the wayside. catastrophically this stifles innovation and the ability to truly generate interdisciplinary solutions. "Mixed teams with different personalities can engage in productive arguments," says Gunter Gruhser. This may be exhausting for all parties involved - but it is supportive of project success.

### **Second tactic: Pay attention to gaps**

Good project managers quickly recognize the gaps in the composition of their team. They know what type of staff is still missing - and actively head-hunt to fill these gaps. HR experts use professional questionnaires or tests. But as a rough guidance common sense is sufficient. Whoever has predominantly introverted, "quiet" employees in the team, should compensate for this: for example, by adding extroverts to the group to ignite lively

## News-Service

- Ideas & Content for Editors –

discussions and the team's energy. Similarly, objectively analytical team members can find their counter-weight in team members who are ideational and visionary and dynamic doers in thoughtful planners.

### **Third tactic: Use screening interviews**

Recruiting project staff is largely based on the assessment of qualifications and professional experience. "Good project managers are also thinking about the emotional intelligence," explains Gunter Gruhser. They inquire about work-styles, team work preferences, and personal goals. Questions about previous project experiences are particularly helpful: What did the employee particularly like about the project work? Why did he feel comfortable in the team? Why did he find the collaboration productive? How do team members have to behave to make everybody feel at home? Such personal engagement is useful in two ways. On the one hand, the project manager gets to know the personality and the work preferences of potential staff. On the other hand, it builds a personal relationship that the project manager can rely on later.

### **Fourth tactic: Connecting people**

Opposites do not always attract each other. Collaboration in a mixed and diverse team of individuals is not easy. Project managers should therefore pay attention to team building. Experienced project managers ensure that their staff get to know each other personally - for example during a barbecue evening or a similar social team events. "It is important that the team members experience the work together as successful and enriching," As an example, the first weeks of working together in a project team can present challenges as teams go through the team development cycle, this may be stressful for some team members and present challenges for the team to work together and manage boundaries and responsibilities. The earlier the project manager addresses the team building the lower the impact of this presents to the team.

## News-Service

- Ideas & Content for Editors –

### **Fifth Tactic: Embrace diversity**

A heterogeneous team presents project managers with leadership challenges. "Project manager need to encourage diversity," says Gunter Gruhser, "our default is to be conflict adverse but it is important to leverage on controversial and polarized discussions." Instead of pushing the team in one direction, experienced project managers manage by objectives and observe the discussions in the team. "This makes it possible to bring out each individual's point of view," says Gunter Gruhser, "so everyone in the team receives feedback, and all opinions are considered and discussed."

### **Sixth tactic: Drive closure**

Allowing the full diversity of the team members to unfold leads to deep discussions and powerful solutions. As long as the collaboration remains fact-based and results-focussed. Eventually, the project manager must drive for closure and results even when not all team members whole-heartedly agree with the decision. "The tension created by a productive dispute must be resolved by results," says Gunter Gruhser. In time, put in the stops, demand the team to deliver results and let the team move on to the completion of a successful project.

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