

TOOLS **FOR EFFECTIVE** **PROJECT TEAM LEADERSHIP**

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Tools for Effective Project Team Leadership

Prepared by the

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High Performance Project Teams Research Team

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Introduction

This set of project leadership tools was prepared by the CII High Performance Work Teams Research Team. The research team investigated methods for establishing high performance project teams that could achieve breakthrough project performance.

The research used in-depth interviews of team members from projects within and outside the construction industry and an extensive survey of owners and contractors to obtain data on characteristics of both high performance and non-high performance project teams. Correlation and regression analyses were used to determine the team characteristics most strongly associated with improved cost and schedule performance, and with team members' perceptions of project and team performance.

Some of the key findings of the research are:

- “High performance” was defined by the majority of respondents as being 10 percent or better performance against established targets for cost, schedule, safety, customer satisfaction and rework, where the targets had already been “aggressively set.”
- A strong association exists between effective project leadership behaviors and reduced project cost or cost growth.
- A strong association also exists between project leadership behaviors and team members' perceptions of project high performance.
- A strong association can be found between team member characteristics and perceptions of team high performance.
- One group of CII best practices was associated with reduced cost or cost growth. Two other groups of CII best practices were associated with reduced schedule duration.
- No strong association was found between formal team building and either actual or perceived project high performance. That is, formal “team building” alone — in the absence of effective, consistent project leadership behaviors — does not automatically lead to team high performance. However, effective leaders inherently perform continuous team building through the use of appropriate leadership practices.

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Another significant finding of the research was that only one out of 151 projects surveyed achieved “breakthrough” performance in both cost and schedule, although 20 percent of the projects beat either the cost or schedule targets by 10 percent or more.

Project *schedule performance* can be influenced most by adoption of selected CII best practices. Project *cost performance* is strongly influenced by project leadership as well as a different set of CII best practices.

Given the extensive work already done within CII on studying and documenting best practices, the research team decided to focus its attention on developing tools to improve project leadership. The tools are based on effective leadership behaviors and member characteristics associated with perceptions of team high performance that were identified in the research. The three tools — Leader Selection Guide, Team Leadership Planner, and Team Health Check — can be used separately or together, and can cover the entire project life cycle.

These tools are based on actual projects, and therefore should be used with judgment when dealing with specific individuals and situations. For example, a directive leadership style — which is not consistent with the identified “best” leadership behaviors — may prove suitable in a project where meeting a tight schedule is important. The criticality of the project and an assessment of all factors most likely to lead to achievement of specific outcomes will determine to what extent certain leadership behaviors are required.

Tool 1:

Leader Selection Guide

Purpose

Early in the life cycle of an engineering and construction project, the senior management sponsors for the project must select the project leaders they believe will develop and execute the project successfully. This selection process occurs within the owner companies as well as within the firms of engineering contractors and constructors. The project leadership role titles vary from company to company and may include venture manager, project manager, project director, construction manager, or others. These individuals ultimately will be held accountable for project success.

Leader selection can be vital to project success. However, common practice frequently calls for the selection of project leaders based primarily on availability. The Leader Selection Guide described in this chapter provides a structured process for senior management to use in selecting leaders with behaviors that are predictors of high performance.

Application

The Leader Selection Guide can be used in the selection of a project leader by a management team or by an individual if input data are obtained from others on certain steps in the assessment and selection process. Those participating in the process must have a good knowledge of all project leader candidates.

To ensure the success of this process, potential project leaders should be identified from a broad base of effective leaders. The search should not be restricted to just those with prior experience as project managers or project engineers.

The leader selection process is divided into five steps that are applied in series to assess all proposed candidates:

1. Evaluate candidates for “must have” characteristics.
2. Determine candidate availability.
3. Assess leadership behaviors for each candidate.

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4. Assess risk for each candidate.
 5. Compare candidates on a behavior-risk matrix and select the most suitable.

Four worksheets are provided as job aids in performing these steps.

Step 1. Assess Mandatory Requirements (Worksheet 1)

Candidates must have certain mandatory characteristics, attributes, and skills to be considered for a project leadership role. Worksheet 1, which is used to assess the candidates against the mandatory requirements, provides a suggested list. However, the selection team should customize the “must have” characteristics for the specific industry and project being considered. For example, language skills might be a mandatory requirement for a project outside the U.S. After finalizing the required attributes, the selection team should complete the first portion of Worksheet 1 for each candidate.

Step 2. Availability (Worksheet 1)

Candidate availability should be confirmed as the final “must have” condition. Often the best candidates for the project leader role will be hard to make available. A key to breakthrough project success is that executive management of the sponsoring organizations must ensure that the best leadership candidates are made available despite the possible detriments in doing so.

Viable candidates are those who have “yes” answers for all part 1 “must have” characteristics and conditions, and also who can be made available when needed.

Leader Selection Guide

Worksheet 1: Mandatory Requirements

Candidate Name _____

STEP 1: Assess “Must Have” Characteristics/Conditions		
Good general knowledge of contracting strategy, project phases, and project delivery systems for the construction industry	YES	NO
Good understanding of related business critical success factors	YES	NO
Capacity to determine and align the needs of the key stakeholders	YES	NO
Adequate understanding of facilities operations and start-up	YES	NO
Other project-specific “must have” conditions: (to be developed by selection team)	YES	NO
Is this a viable candidate? (Must answer “yes” on all Step 1 questions above.)	YES	NO
If “YES” proceed to Step 2.		
STEP 2: Determine Availability		
Can candidate be made available when needed?	YES	NO
If YES, perform leadership behavior assessment (Worksheet 2)		