

FEATURES

The Join-Up Meeting

by W. Scott Cameron

I recently took on a new assignment and, as is my norm, I scheduled a series of one-hour, 1:1 join-up meetings with the various lead personnel on the team and their hierarchy. During one of these meetings, the person I was meeting with informed me how pleasantly surprised she was that I had scheduled this meeting as very few individuals took the time anymore to have them.

I was shocked. I was taught that establishing a 1:1 relationship with the people on your team is critical to the project's success. This was the first time I'd heard anything like this about join-up meetings. I filed this feedback away.

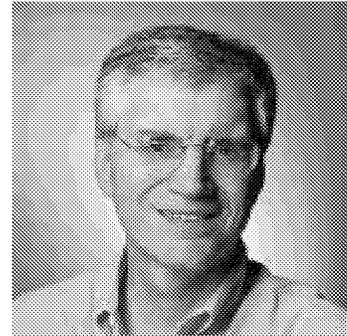
Later I was talking to my project manager-mentor, and he indicated he had finished his join-up meetings with every person in his new organization. He also indicated his predecessor had conducted few, if any, join-up meetings.

Again, I was shocked. When I reflected on these two experiences, I realized a very negative trend might be emerging in our fast-paced, schedule-driven, 500-e-mail-per-day, cell-phone-ringing, 24/7-communication, multi-tasking work lives: **NO FACE TIME!**

Face time is what you spend with people to talk about the project you are working on, their expectations of you, your expectations of them, your hierarchy's expectations about each of you, and/or—last but certainly not least—what each of you plans on achieving during the project. A 1:1, face-to-face, join-up meeting is the only way I know to build solid trust between the project manager and the team members and their hierarchy. The project manager can then use the information gathered in these meetings to help develop the team structure and dynamics.

Join-up meetings are a big deal for me, and I rate them at the top of my meeting-importance meter. These are the meetings where I discover if an individual's success criteria are different than the team's success criteria. Even though a person has agreed to the team's criteria, they may actually be motivated by other criteria, which could negatively impact the project.

"There is no I in team" is an axiom that applies to a project as much as any other kind of team endeavor. A project manager spends most of his or her time and effort managing/motivating individuals on the team to get in sync with the whole team's success criteria. The face-to-face join-up meeting is integral to understanding each "I" in the team.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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The Join-Up Meeting (cont'd)



Join-up meetings are not only crucial for hardware integration, but also form an important stage of team building, as Scott Cameron points out in his article.

Another thing I've learned in my career is that no matter how well I think I know people, if I don't take the time to have a "formal" join-up meeting with them, and understand what is motivating them, it's possible I may find out their expectations are very different than what I've assumed. For example, I was the project manager of a project in which the lead technical engineer and I had worked

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The Join-Up Meeting (cont'd)

together earlier in our careers. Since I had worked with him before, I didn't feel the need to "join up." That was a big mistake.

This individual consistently committed to doing things on the project. I was impressed and felt he was showing great leadership. However, as the project progressed I noticed another trait. The individual did not meet any of his commitments. This was having a negative impact on the project. Thus, I began taking responsibility away from him and giving it to others to ensure the project's success.

After awhile, the individual and I had a belated join-up meeting. During this meeting I learned his boss had said that he needed to demonstrate leadership and commit to do more than his fair share of work on this project to be considered for promotion. The boss failed to point out that meeting his commitments was also crucial to being promoted.

This example is a continual reminder for me of the importance of the join-up meeting. Had I known what his success criteria were, I certainly would have reevaluated his role on the project, or at the least talked with him about how best to synchronize his personal success criteria with the team's.