Delivering High Performance for Short-Term Turnaround and Long-Term Success

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Six months into a critical two-year project, an engineering services firm’s project team—hired by a major electric and gas company—was not performing well enough to meet its commitments. The team’s productivity was down 39% and the project was more than 65% over budget. The engineering services firm turned to JMW for support in getting the effort back on track. Six months later, the project team had increased productivity by 54% and put the effort back on schedule, 6% under budget.

The Challenge

The project team of a global engineering services firm was hired by one of the largest electric and gas companies in the region for their support of a critical two-year project. If the team was successful, there would be significant future business opportunities with the client.

However, six months into the two-year project, the results were disappointing. The project team was more than 65% over budget, and overall productivity down 39%, meaning it was taking almost twice as much time as projected to deliver against the contracted schedule. The engineering firm engaged JMW for support in delivering on the challenge of dramatically improving performance for the short term, getting the project under budget and back on schedule, and sustaining high performance to deliver on future opportunities.

The Work

To address the significant challenges, JMW designed a comprehensive approach to the engagement consisting of designing and delivering a series of short, yet impactful team meetings in addition to individual coaching sessions over the course of six months.

The team meetings were developed to:
- Enable the project managers and key project leads to effectively discuss both what was working and what needed to improve in an open and non-confrontational manner
- Identify high-leverage pathways to deal with current challenges—always looking for a solution versus blame
- Develop action plans consisting of new ideas and solutions, bringing a high degree of creativity and partnership
- Determine new ways to execute the plan to deliver key milestones

In addition, the coaching sessions with project leads focused on providing real leadership and courage by training them in the behaviors and tools needed to successfully engage and implement their action plans.

Central aspects of the work included a focus on interdisciplinary communication and collaboration, particularly between designers and engineers, who had been working in silos rather than together. In addition, the group and coaching sessions reinforced the importance of a sense of accountability for resolving issues and presenting solutions to the client, of working more closely with the client as a team member (versus adversary), and of improving financial and scheduling diligence while still putting the fundamental focus on the critical work at hand.

The Results

Within six months, performance had improved dramatically, the project was back on schedule, and costs had been contained below budget. In the words of the Project Manager: “What impressed me about the Project Team was not only the fact that the team turned around the project efficiently, but how they collaborated with each other to make sure everyone had the experience of winning!”
More specifically, the results at the conclusion of the six-month effort included the following outcomes:

**High Performance and Productivity**
- Overall productivity improved 54%
- Participants attributed the significant levels of improved performance to newly collaborative and interdisciplinary working relationships, a re-calibrated relationship between designers and engineers, and a re-framed approach to the client
- The Productivity Index rose to 0.94 from its previous level of 0.61

**Budgetary Discipline in a New Context**
- After beginning the project 65% over budget, the project team was 6% under budget at the conclusion of the six-month engagement
- A key focus of the effort included increased procurement diligence to better control the Total Integrated Cost (TIC) and a change in a key vendor relationship
- A shift in focus on overall performance as a priority—while still paying attention to budget—resulted in improved margins and overall greater cost-effectiveness

**A Project Back on Target**
- Although the project was behind schedule after its first six months, at the conclusion of the engagement, the effort was back on schedule
- Participants attributed the improvement to a new approach to the work and deadlines, including greater collaboration with designers at critical junctures before engineering was implemented, “pushback” to the client when expectations were out of scope, model review meetings, working more closely with the client, and engaging in more collaborative problem-solving when issues arose

**A New Future**
The electric and gas company was so impressed with the project turnaround that they hired the same engineering services firm for their next major project.

“You find out how effective a contractor is based on how they react to unpredictable challenges. This Project Team’s tenacity in getting the project back on schedule and under budget, and responsiveness to our needs, restored our confidence in them as our ‘Partner of Choice’ for future projects.”

— As stated by the client’s Project Director