

Project Team Dynamics: Enhancing Performance, Improving Results.

***By Lisa DiTullio. Published by Management Concepts, Inc.
(380 pages, paperback, \$42 at amazon.com)***

Reviewed By: James R. Brady, PhD, MPA, MEd.

Target Audience: The author's Introduction suggests that all types of project team members can benefit from her book. She is dedicated to "simple" approaches to the complexities of being a Project Manager: **"When things get too complicated, change your assumptions and try again. Keep it simple to be successful."** (page xii). As implied by the book's title, the author primarily focuses on team and group dynamics and harmony. She tells us: "This book is a compilation of best practices, tips, and techniques identified during my association with clients, colleagues, and project management professionals---all in support of healthy team dynamics." (page xiii). She stresses that the material applies to all types of teams and then modestly suggests to readers: **"So feel free to share the book with other teams. They will thank you."** (page xiii)

Organization of the Book: In Chapter 1, "Defining the Team," Project Managers are told not to focus on recruiting specific individuals that they know and think can perform particular project jobs: "Identifying what is needed on the team rather than who you want on the team is a great way to approach functional managers when requesting resources. When you are able to describe the skills, expertise, and assets of what you need on the team, you are effectively informing managers how to develop other staff members who might not quite have what it takes to make the team today. This has long term value for both you as the requesting manager and the functional manager." (page 19)

The author's strategy might be relevant where the entire organization is deeply committed to supporting projects and functional managers encourage their staffs to take project assignments. However, in many situations, the functional managers often want to assign their less qualified staff to outside project tasks and keep their best employees working on their functional unit tasks. The author's advice on this issue is again quite simple: "Be willing to accept rookie players. New members bring fresh perspective to solving project challenges, there's nothing like a fresh set of eyes to solve an old problem." (page 19).

Such an optimistic perspective on staffing up with amateurs may be appropriate for some routine or low priority projects. However, it could be disastrous to initiate a complex and high priority project with unqualified team members in key positions. The author then seems to switch her perspective on staffing and stresses the need for the Project Manager to not only verify that team members are technically qualified, but to also ask candidates pointed questions about personal behavior to ensure that they also possess the "ideal team characteristics". (page 21).

She includes her checklist of 31 "Behavioral Interview Questions" for the Project Manager to use in assessing a candidate's personal behavior, work habits, interpersonal problems, etc. (pages 25-26). We are told: "Using behavior-based methods to screen team candidates has become increasingly popular---and necessary." (page 21). She does not define the professional training, research, or certification which is required to compile or use such behavioral interrogation and interpretation instruments and methods. If these behavioral assessment procedures will generate personal information files on an employee or candidate for employment, Project Managers might want to check out the legal and other organizational implications before pursuing such an approach.

Chapter 1 discusses how the Project Manager should recruit team staff and orient them on the specifics of the new project. However, the author does not cover activities to actually define and approve the project until Chapter 2: "Clarifying Team Goals." She indicates that one of the Project Manager's tasks is thus to convene a "Project Initiation Workshop" of stakeholders to make decisions on all key aspects of the project (including project goals, deliverables, desired outcomes, and progress milestones). The author estimates that her suggested agenda for this key meeting could probably be completed in less than four hours!! (see pages 31-43). If this is the author's typical time management experience in getting all of the needed organizational and client buy-ins at a project initiation session of a major project, she is surely blessed!

The balance of the book is devoted to the author's suggestions for maintaining smooth-running teams in which people get along and do their jobs well. Some of her suggestions for dealing with interpersonal or other conflicts often seem ideal or over-simplified for complex projects in large organizations. In Chapter 5, "Managing Group Conflict", she maintains that a simple four-step process is all that that the Project Manager needs to address most intra-team conflicts:

- Step 1: Individuals will try to resolve the conflict with each other.
- Step 2: If two individuals cannot resolve the conflict, the team leader will intervene.
- Step 3: If the team leader cannot facilitate resolution, an outside facilitator will mediate.
- Step 4: Once the conflict is resolved, other team members will be apprised of the outcome. (page 102).

The author does not define the maximum amount of time that should be allocated for each step of her conflict resolution model. However, I think that a Project Manager who cannot promptly resolve a conflict between two of his or team members on a critical project would probably be placing their job at risk if he had to ask their superiors to bring in an outsider to do it for them.

General Assessment of the Book: I found it difficult to follow the flow and consistency between many sections of the book. Too many of the suggested team leadership strategies seem overly simplistic and inadequately linked to actual work experiences or specific relevant research sources.

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Some of the detailed and complex guidelines point the Project Manager in one direction and then the author often concludes that there are also simpler ways of doing the job. After stressing the importance of behavioral assessments of team performance, she notes: "Many project teams, however, do not have the luxury of indulging in such assessments; the project demands don't allow them to delve deeply into personality analytics. Today's project teams are often thrust together and expected to get the job done as quickly as possible." (page 101). Perhaps this book would have been more beneficial if the author had stuck to this basic premise and suggested options for coping in such environments? However, readers who are especially interested in using "personality analytics" to increase harmony among team members may find more of the author's approaches to be of interest.

Editor's Note: Thanks Dr. Brady! Readers, if you would like to make a comment about this review, please [contact us!](#)

Overall Rating: 2.5 (out of 5):  James R. Brady, PhD, MPA, MEd.