

Managing high profile project teams

Dealing with high profile knowledge workers need not be as difficult as one feel.. All it needs is an ability to look at the changed team composition and be happy about it, than getting nervous about it. Handling such high potential teams become very rewarding and enjoyable, if one can pro-actively apply the key **principles** of [FBAR](#) (first break all rules) by Marcus Buckingham & Curt Coffman to real life project management. I am emphasizing the word 'principle' because, when in intelligent teams, techniques wont work, and principles will. I still remember the key points which hit me, when I read the book a couple of years back, which means these points should have benefited me. By nature, it is very difficult for me to remember names of people, books, authors etc. The very fact that I could remember FBAR and the it's underlying concepts even after two years, by itself is the proof of it's relevancy in day to day work.

Okay, I already goofed up. I already said that, I have the inability to remember names!. Oops!, I meant to say that, I have the ability to forget names!. Who said that it is a weakness?, the ability to forget things, creates the ability to learn new things!, so it is a strength. Let us start the discussion from the point of strength.

The **key points** that come to my mind, when I think of [FBAR](#) are;

1) Everyone joins organizations as motivated and daring to go individuals. As the days passes by, majority of them slowly slips into the de motivation spiral, which will eventually teach them to subscribe to mediocrity. Some slow and steady entropy happens day by day in most of the cases. Hence the first and foremost challenge of the project manager is not in just motivating them further but the fundamental challenge is in insulating them from de-motivation. Read it again. The underlying message has some inner message. [Zen](#) on it.

2) Somebody is selected into the team for their strengths. Hence as a manager, your focus should be on their strengths than their weaknesses. If as a manager, you focus only on the weaknesses of the team members, then you lose focus on their strengths. The following paragraph from a story can explain this easily;

Once upon a time, the animals decided they should do something meaningful to meet the problems of the new world. So they organized a school.

They adopted an activity curriculum of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects.

The *duck* was excellent at swimming; in fact, better than his instructor. But he made only passing grades in flying, and was very poor at running. Since he was slow in running, he had to drop swimming and stay after school to practice running. This caused his web feet to be badly worn, so that he was only average in swimming. But average was quite acceptable so nobody worried about that--except the duck.

The *rabbit* started at the top of his class in running, but developed a nervous twitch in his leg muscles because of so much make-up work in swimming.

The *squirrel* was excellent in climbing, but he encountered constant frustration in flying class because his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He developed "charlie horses" from overexertion, and so only got a C in climbing and a D in running.

The *eagle* was a problem child and was severely disciplined for being a non-conformist. In climbing he beat all the others to the top of the tree, but insisted on using his way to get there

A duck is a duck--and *only* a duck. It is built to swim, not to run or fly and certainly not to climb. A squirrel is a squirrel--and *only* that. To move it out of its forte, climbing, and then expect it to swim or fly will drive squirrel nuts. Eagles are beautiful creatures in the air but not in a foot race. The rabbit will win every time unless, of course, the eagle gets hungry.

For a moment, just think about the performance appraisals you had with your supervisors. At the end of them, were you motivated or de motivated than you were before the performance appraisal?. From my experience, very often it was very de-motivating. Majority of the time, the guy who was sitting on the other side of the table was busy in pointing out, what I did wrong and where I should improve. I was alright with this approach, when I was very new to the job,

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and the guy sitting on the other side was more qualified and highly experienced than me. As the days passed by, my experience and skill levels grew, and the difference between me and my bosses started narrowing down and at the same time, ironically, the tone of the performance appraisals remained the same, and naturally me too picked up the same style, till I came across some thing better, and that mantra is 'focus on the strengths, than the weaknesses'.

What if, the guy sitting on the other side, do not have any strengths, which is relevant to my work?

The following passage from the '[Art of War](#)' may throw some light into this;

The skilled employer of men will employ the wise man, the brave man, the covetous man and the stupid man. For the wise man delights in establishing his merit, the brave man likes to show his courage in action, the covetous man is quick at seizing advantages, and the stupid man has no fear of death.

In project scenarios, you are not going to get the ideal team well suited and well balanced for the work on hand. One has to get the best out of the given team to meet the project objectives.

What is the moral of the story. In a team environment, every one comes with certain skills and strengths. As a team leader if you can identify these strengths as early as possible and then create an environment where team members can support each other based on their strengths, then the job is done. Like any other good stuff, this will not happen automatically. The manager has to create an environment of trust and caring within teams. How?

Where to start?

Please rate yourself on the following 12 questions, on a 1 to 5 scale, where 5 > 1. Do not think too much before answering. Use [Blink](#). the first rating that comes to your mind is the correct one.

- 1) Do I know what is expected of me at work?
- 2) Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
- 3) At work do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?

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- 4) In the last seven days, have I received recognition or praise for good work?
- 5) Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
- 6) Is there someone at work, who encourages my development?
- 7) At work, do my opinions seem to count?
- 8) Does the mission / purpose of my project make me feel like my work is important?
- 9) Are my co-workers committed to do quality work?
- 10) Do I have the best friend at work?
- 11) In the last six months, have I talked with someone about my progress?
- 12) At work, have I had opportunities to learn and grow?

These twelve questions are the simplest and most accurate way to measure the strength of a work place. As a manager, your only challenge is to get a high score on these 12 questions from your team. This is how we went ahead;

- We all, answered this questionnaire once in 3 months, initially, once improved, it became once in 6 months
- We aggregated the scores at the team level, and the team level scores were discussed in the team meetings to storm our minds for those most appropriate actions, which would improve the team scores.
- The individual filled up questionnaires were discussed in one to one meetings in a very open way

The results we got;

- The trust level within the team improved
- Spent less time in monitoring and control

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- Everyone started believing that they are on some very important mission
- Candid feedbacks at every level, accepted with willingness, resulted in better work results
- No sudden attritions. Because of the open environment, even bad news were discussed well in advance

Reference

- First break all rules by Marcus Buckingham & Curt Coffman
- The art of war by Sun Tzu

About the author

Abrachan is a Corporate Consultant, Coach and Practitioner of Software engineering, Project management and Quality management. He has around two decades of experience in software development, quality management and project management. He started his career as a computer programmer and subsequently played the roles of Systems Analyst, Senior consultant, Project manager, Senior project manager, Head – QA, Manager – Process Engineering and Profit center head. He worked for organizations such as HCL, FEC, OTE, Think Business Networks and Novell. At Novell, he did the project management of 'Pragati', a comprehensive tool for software project management, which got accolades at Linux Bangalore, Brain share USA and Brain share Europe. At present he works for Prologic systems (private) limited, as its Managing Director.

He is the architect of the PMPdistilled premium PMP preparatory program, which is being delivered in multiple countries successfully. He has successfully conducted several customized project management programs for several leading organizations. He is a member of the OPM3® 2007 Update Project Team, PMI, SPIN and SPI - SIG (software process improvement special interest group). He co-authored and conducted a workshop on iterative software development at the SPM-ICON, 2004 international conference on project management.

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