



BUILDING

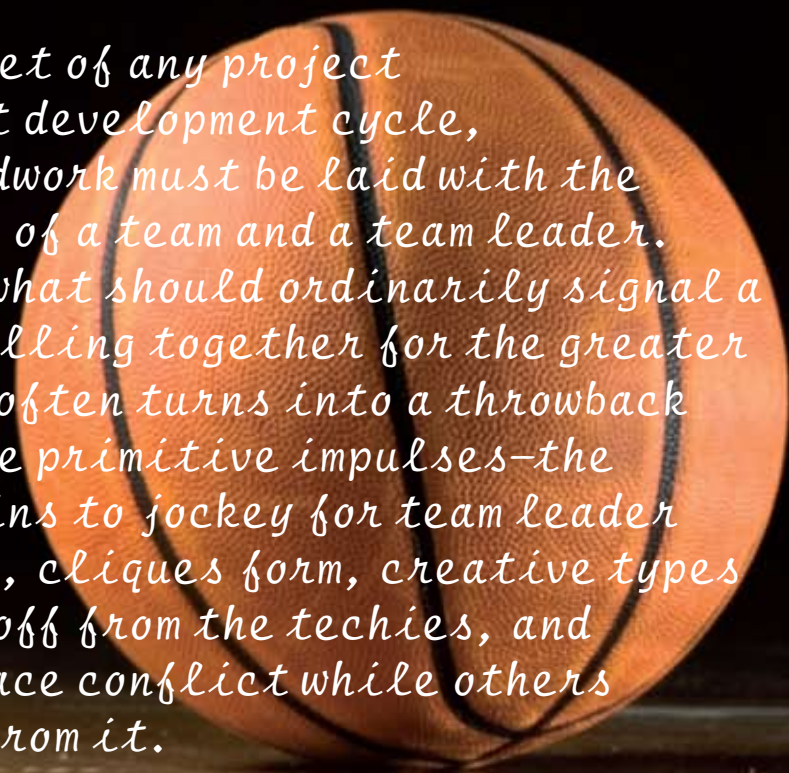
CHAMPIONSHIP

TEAMS

BY KEVIN R. CARMAN

*An effective
Integrated Product
Team model can
help teams be
more cohesive,
achieve greater
efficiencies in
product delivery,
and lead to better
results in project
and program
management.*





At the onset of any project or product development cycle, the groundwork must be laid with the formation of a team and a team leader. However, what should ordinarily signal a time of pulling together for the greater good most often turns into a throwback to our more primitive impulses—the staff begins to jockey for team leader positions, cliques form, creative types splinter off from the techies, and some embrace conflict while others run away from it.

In short, team development can sometimes revert to family reunion time during the holidays. This is often at the heart of why program management gets off on the wrong foot.

Traditionally, teams succeed after four stages:

- **Forming**—coming together as a team,
- **Storming**—jockeying and infighting to see who leads the team,
- **Norming**—where team members begin to know their place, and
- **Goal-achieving performance**—where a sense of real teamwork can be felt.¹

While in the end the team is successful, so much time, energy, and effort is lost during the storming stage as teams struggle to focus on the mission and end product.

Team dynamics must be more cohesive from the start, which is why a new model was recently introduced to bring more integration and cohesion to product development teams. Mandated by the Department of Defense (DOD) and encouraged by the Government Accountability Office for civilian agencies, the “Integrated Product Team” (IPT) model has become more conspicuous in both the government and private sector settings as a way to achieve greater efficiencies in product delivery, which can in turn be applied to achieve better results in project and program management.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT REDEFINED

As part of the acquisition reform process, the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition and Technology issued a *Guide to Integrated Product and Process Development* (IPPD) in 1996,² defining an “IPT” as representatives from appropriate functional disciplines

working together on a team to build successful and balanced programs, identify and resolve issues, and make sound and timely recommendations to facilitate decision-making.

The guide acknowledged that IPPD had taken hold in many commercial and government organizations and was seen as the most effective approach moving forward. The *Federal Acquisition Regulation* and DOD acquisition policy was changed to direct program managers to implement IPTs within an IPPD framework to reengineer the major systems acquisition process so that product development would be more affordable, on schedule, and responsive to customer needs.

IPPD is a break from the traditional approach to project management, which operates from a hierarchal, top-down approach. In an IPPD framework, the program manager is accountable and responsible for everything from funding, development,

and systems demonstration to integration fielding and life cycle support—with each individual part farmed out to design engineering, development, integration, testing, and procurement along the way.

This approach leads to a very competitive environment:

[E]ach functional organization, working on its piece part, vies for resources provided by the project office.... The result is often over- and under-funding of the differing technical areas. Under-funded areas naturally cause project delay. Redesign, which is costly and generally reserved to solve integration problems, increases program time and money requirements. Thus, the decision-making process is further aggravated by management “stovepipes” and inefficient communication.³

The IPPD approach, in contrast, focuses from the start on the integration of all needed skills (program management, technical development, systems engineering, contracting, whole-life engineering, etc.). At the core

of this approach is the IPT, or the formation of cross-functional teams created for the specific purpose of delivering a product for an external or internal customer. Team members have complementary skills and are committed to a common purpose, common mission objectives, and an approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable for the success of the project.

In more basic terms, IPTs are all about developing cohesive teams at the earliest stages and skipping over the storming phase. From the get-go, IPTs avoid a power struggle through open communications, preset objectives and goals, and a focus on the end product with a delivery schedule.

However, not all tasks or projects require an IPT. These teams usually form around more complex projects that must pull in different disciplines, integrate data across organizations, and benefit from creative, nontraditional thinking for solving an intractable, vexing problem.

FORMING AN IPT

The first thing you should consider is whether or not you need an IPT. Start by identifying the mission or specific tasks to be accomplished. The task list may very well determine how many stakeholders will be involved and the complexity and dynamics of the team environment. Then, after considering the specific task and its environment, look at the nature of the data, information, and knowledge that must be brought to bear to accomplish the task. If you decide to move forward with an IPT, there are several important decisions to be made that distinguish IPTs from more traditional models.

As an example, the notional IPT structure in **FIGURE 1** on the next page identifies a major system development project. This structure can be tailored to the program requirements and projected outcomes.⁴

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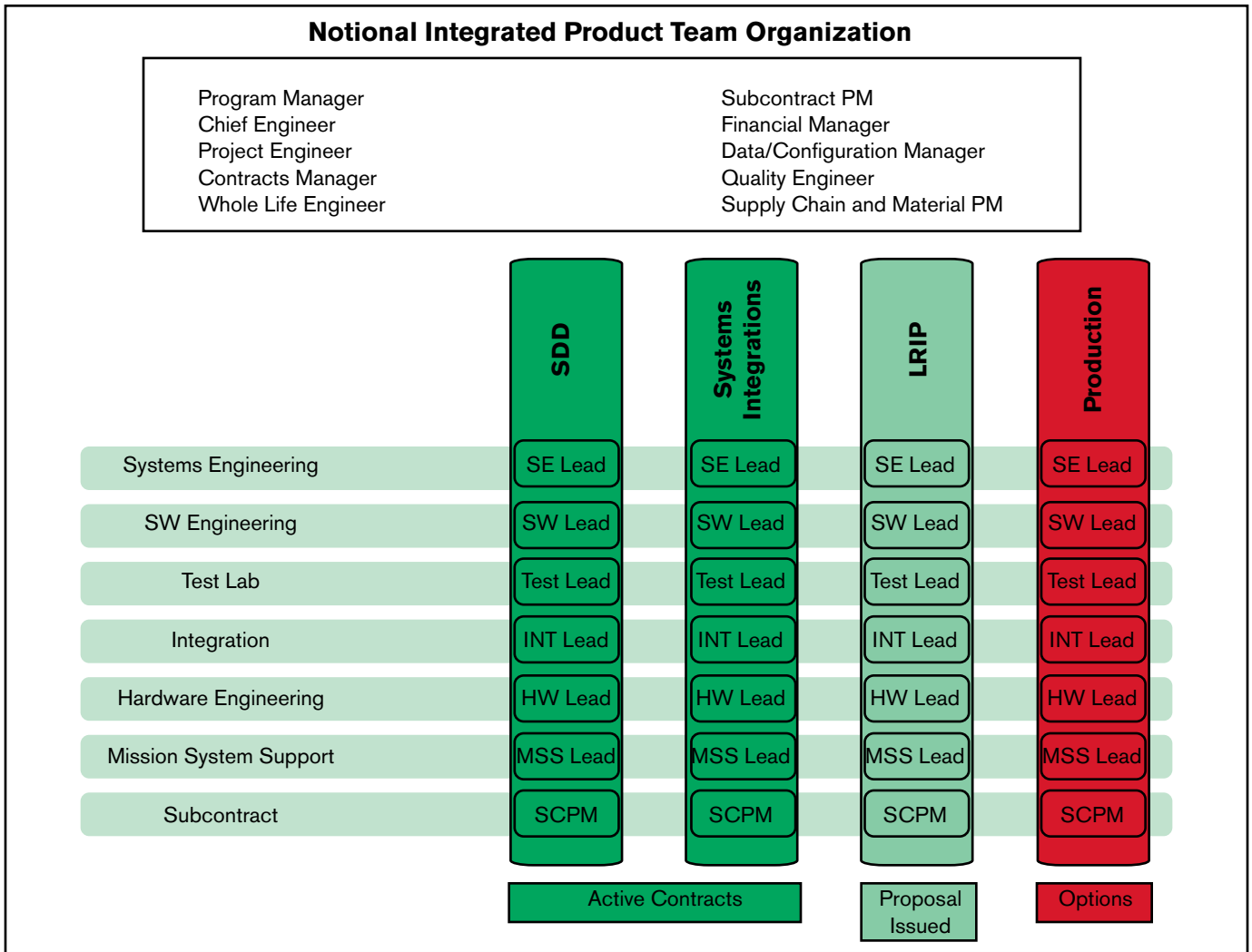
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FIGURE 1.



Select a Team Leader

The team leader is not the “boss” in the traditional sense, but assumes the role as the team facilitator. Rather than being assigned this role based on seniority or title, an IPT leader should possess leadership characteristics that support a teamwork environment, such as skills in interpersonal relations, the ability to listen, patience,

facilitation, coaching, and communications. Specifically, an IPT team leader should be able to:

- Provide team leadership and coaching;
- Focus the team on the tasks at hand or the internal and external customer requirements;
- Coordinate team logistics; and

- Communicate team status, task accomplishment, and direction.⁵

Selecting Team Members

Each IPT needs an organizational product structure that identifies which personnel are required from each department to support the functional IPT development effort. The functional leadership assigns members, or in some cases conducts interviews in



order to sort through various potential team members. In the end, members should be selected based on their professional skills, experience, and technical knowledge while avoiding members who would not integrate well with the team.

If possible, team members should be in close physical proximity to each other, as this allows relationships to build more quickly and supports timely, one-on-one communication versus heavy reliance on e-mails or teleconferencing. With close proximity, team members reach out to discuss and coordinate more readily, there are more opportunities for team members to give and receive feedback, and there will be more timely responsiveness to issues.

Team Kick-Off

The first team meeting is a prime opportunity to put a solid, defined plan in place and to ensure all involved understand the task at hand. The team leader should review the project objectives, the specifications/



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customer requirements, design targets, cost, and schedule. Then, after ample time for the fielding of questions, the entire team needs to buy into the IPT plan. Management support for IPTs is crucial to their effectiveness and motivation. Therefore, senior managers should attend and provide a show of support.

Once the first team meeting is adjourned, everyone should be able to answer the following questions:

- Where does this IPT fit into the overall program?

- What are the overarching issues and objectives that drive the requirements for this IPT?
- How does the IPT schedule mesh with the program schedule?
- Will the IPT depend on other IPTs or organizations for data or products?
- How dependent is the overall program upon the results produced by this IPT?

With these questions answered, the IPT should leave with a mission or charter and an organizational structure that outlines the purpose of the IPT, the names of the team members, the performance goals of the team, the responsibility and accountability of each team member, resources, and the project schedule.

Aside from these very concrete steps to IPT building, there will be other teambuilding elements that will take shape. Team members will have to adjust to different personalities,

methods in processing information, and work styles while some amount of “norming” occurs. However, with basic orientation and expectations clearly communicated from the team leader on how to work as a team and achieve consensus, the norming phase should happen more quickly.

Team members should also be empowered to represent their functional department and not be subjected to running every decision by the department manager. They were selected to streamline what is normally a very lengthy, drawn-out process riddled with departmental politics. Therefore, department managers need to understand that they can provide guidance, but should not second-guess IPT members. Empowerment results in a motivated, active, and unbiased team member.

JUST REMEMBER THIS...

Building and forming IPTs does not have to be like navigating your way through a maze blindfolded. Other organizations have



gone down the IPT path only to learn the hard way what works and what will not be successful. The following are several tried-and-true lessons that any project manager or contracting officer should heed before building an IPT:

- Upper management needs to support the IPT process, no matter what. When the going gets tough, some will question whether it makes more sense to revert back to the old model. Upper management needs to encourage and personally advocate soldiering on with learning how to make an IPT work.
- Don't start without defining the IPT's purpose, as well as deciding on end products, process and product measures, resources, and team incentives.
- Define and commit to IPT roles and responsibilities. For the eventual differences of opinion, decide on procedures for effective consensus building.
- Communication among IPTs is essential. Therefore, establish a formal mechanism for communications and make sure everyone understands what work is best done as a team, subteam, or individually.
- Define how IPT work fits into the overall management environment and how members are going to be appraised and rewarded. Buy-in will fade quickly if team members don't understand how an individual appraisal is related to the success of the team.

LEAVE RANK AT THE DOOR—A CASE STUDY

During my tenure as a program manager with the U.S. Navy, I oversaw a program that was migrating from a development environment to a systems and software integration environment. We decided to form an IPT to change our vendors' contract from a cost-plus-fixed-fee to a performance-based, cost-plus-award-fee arrangement for software development and integration for a major program.

We needed to achieve better performance from our contractors who were failing to meet government requirements for cost, quality, scheduling, and overall management. An IPT seemed like a perfect fit since we needed to bring together quality, scheduling, cost, and engineering disciplines to create a workable, customer-focused contract that would ensure the business would be retained.

Understanding the important elements of a team leader, I didn't hesitate to appoint a senior intern as the team leader, knowing that this particular individual had the interpersonal skills and direct experience in structuring effective time and cost schedules for these types of performance-based contracts. It did not take long for an uprising to take place among the staff. Many refused to work for a senior intern, offended that I had chosen an intern over a seasoned employee with more experience. As the program manager, I had a responsibility to develop our future leadership and to support the IPT approach, knowing that the team leader I selected would be able to get the best performance from the team members and draw on their expertise when needed.

Soon enough, the team members did see the wisdom of my choice, and they quickly turned to another important IPT tenet—focusing on customer needs, the product, and the delivery schedule. The IPT began to work independently, but communicated often on various aspects of the project. With representatives from our contractors, hardware and software engineering, systems and whole-life engineering, finance, data management, supply chain, and quality directorates, the IPT team began to hammer out improvements to key areas of the contract structure.

For example, we needed an incentive for the analysis, correction, and testing of software errors that could meet more aggressive software build schedules and result in software that would run as expected. By bringing finance and quality team members together, we created a sliding award fee incentive payment structure, whereby we rewarded the vendor for reducing the number of direct hours expended to fix any software problems

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(3 percent fee if done within 48 hours, 2 percent fee if done within 52 hours, or down to 1 percent if 55 hours or more). Previously, it took vendors approximately 58 hours to correct software errors, which was much too long.

Then, for each contractor we needed an efficient and replicable system of “rating” software errors on a scale from minor to severe, as well as a new software progress report schedule. The data manager, software engineer, and code writer worked with each contractor to develop a rating system and enact a requirement for progress reports every other week and to hold regular meetings as the corrections were being made.

At the end of the project, we had made significant progress. Where it used to take 58 hours to complete a software correction, our program was able to reduce the number to 45 hours, which kept the program on schedule and reduced the software development cost. We had a schedule in place and a quality control system to ensure timely and error-free software.

Prior to the IPT, the contractors were rated as “Red,” which meant unsatisfactory performance in software development, schedule, quality, and overall management. After the IPT process, the contractors were rated either “Green” or “Blue,” meaning the vendors were meeting or exceeding the government requirements.

The three principles of IPT had made this effort a success:

- No power struggles,
- Open communication, and
- A focus on delivery.

ARE YOU READY FOR IPT SUCCESS?

Theory and practice are two different things. Therefore, it’s useful to have a checklist as you run through how you can structure your first or next IPT. When forming an IPT, make sure team members can check off the following “must-haves”:

- Trained in the operation of effective IPTs,
- Communicates on a regular basis with the team leader,
- Commits to the objectives of the IPT,
- Represents his or her functional area without bias,
- Attempts to resolve issues within the IPT,
- Quickly elevates unresolved issues that are impeding program progress, and
- An IPT-formed charter with realistic goals, objectives, and schedules.

Forming an IPT is somewhat like making a culinary dish. You can have the right ingredients and know the steps of putting them all together, but the secret to success is that special something—the intuition to not just follow the instructions, but to know instinctively how and when to blend ingredients.

Likewise, to bring an IPT together, contracting officers need to have not only the technical expertise, but also the emotional intelligence to foster positive, communicative, interpersonal relationships that make for successful team building. This balance is at the heart of forming an IPT that not only increases the product's value, streamlines production schedules, and results in cost improvements, but also sparks innovation and professional growth. **CM**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DR. KEVIN R. CARMAN is a senior instructor with ESI International. With more than 30 years' experience in acquisition and contract management, he has worked extensively with the Department of Defense and civilian department of the U.S. federal government and within the civilian sector. Prior to retiring from the U.S. Navy, where he held the rank of Captain, Dr. Carman was the commanding officer of the Navy Office of Special Projects in Washington, DC. He completed his 30-year career as the commander at the Defense Accounting and Finance Center in San Diego and Oakland, California. Dr. Carman can be contacted at carmanassociates@aol.com.

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ENDNOTES

1. Derived from Owen Gadeken, "Leading Project Management Teams," *Project Management* (July/August 2002): 76.
2. Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Acquisition and Technology), *DOD Guide to Integrated Product Teams Development* (Washington, DC: February 1996).
3. Richard W. Bregerd and Taylor Chasteen, "Implementing Integrated Product Development," *Acquisition Review Quarterly* (Fall 1996): 163.
4. Source: ESI International.
5. Kenneth Crow, "Building Effective Product Development Teams," DRM Associates paper (1996).



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