Organizational Engineering and Project Management

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In this paper you will learn how choice engineering can be used to improve corporate culture, and as a result, improve the bottom line of your company. In some most large companies, issues related to the corporate culture lead to disengaged employees and subsequent loss of productivity. You learn a few choice engineering tricks that will create a positive working environment for your team members, your boss, and yourself.

Are you Borg?

Our favorite creatures in Star Trek are Borg. Just to remind you, the Borg are cybernetic life-form thousands of years old who are part organic, part artificial life. In the fictional universe of Star Trek, the Borg inhabit a vast region of space, possessing millions of space vessels having conquered and assimilated thousands of civilizations. They operate solely toward fulfilling of one purpose: to add the biological and technological distinctiveness of other species to their own in pursuit of perfection. How they do it? They implant synthetic components or nanoprobes into each individual, and as result, assimilate the individual into the *collective*. Also referred to as the "hive mind" or "collective consciousness", this is the term used to describe the group consciousness of the Borg civilization. Each Borg individual, or drone, is linked to the collective by a sophisticated subspace network that ensures each member is given constant supervision and guidance. The hive-mind drones do not register as individual life-signs when scanned, only as a mass reading. The Borg are also able to adapt quickly to any perceived threats. So entrenched has the idea of the Borg become in popular culture, that it is common to refer to large organizations or bureaucracies (see the IRS) against which "resistance is futile" as the Borg.

Working in a company, we may get the sense that there is something irrational about the corporate culture or system, but due to social or professional pressures, we tend to push aside any unease we may feel and instead try to make the best of what could be a bad system. Moreover, if we hang on long enough, in spite our initial misgivings, we may

find ourselves actively supporting the system as we make our journey up the corporate ladder on our way to senior management. Why? We become the Borg.

When we join an organization, it is though we have been assimilated into a collective and we start to think as a collective. After a short while, this group think limits our creativity and we stop thinking outside of the box. This can lead to acquiescence and an expectation that expect that somebody will make decisions for us; we start to ignore or not even notice problems with the organization; and, we begin to treat our subordinates in the same manner we are treated by our managers: as small parts of a complex mechanism designed to perform a very limited function.

Corporate culture which exists in many organizations leads to disengagements of employees and significantly affect company's bottom line. It is one of significant obstacles toward improving of company's productivity.

But the main problem is that after we become assimilated into the Borg and we start to believe that system is normal. "Hive mind" prevents us from realizing that modern corporate culture often does not help to improve a company's performance and often hinders it. At the same time, resistance against the system is futile, we can develop

learned helplessness. No matter what we do individually, it does not make a difference, so we become helpless.

Don't be Evil!

 This is the corporate motto of Google (Google 2010). In practical terms it means that Google should be measured against the highest possible standards of ethical business conduct in all aspects of the business: hire great people, who then build great products, which in turn attract loyal users. One of the most important components of this is a thriving corporate culture inside Google. For a number of years, Google has sat at the top of most lists as one of the best companies to work for (Fortune 2010). In addition to great compensation and many perks, such as 401(k) matching and stock-option exchange programs, Google engineers get to devote 20% of their time to projects of their choosing. This is central to Google's plan to create a productive environment that actively engages employees in their work and encourages creativity which should lead to better products and services for their customers and improve the companies bottom line. Does this concept remind you something? We hope so. Google has adopted *choice engineering* as a key aspect of maximizing the company productivity, even they did not refer to their policies in this way. Effective organizations avoid mandating certain choices as this creates a bureaucracy of rules, procedures, regulations, that by its very nature is counterproductive. Successful companies steer their employees towards making better choices using minimal policing and effective policies that stimulate employee creativity and engagement.

Disclosure Therapy

If you are an investor, you are probably familiar with the term full disclosure. In the investment world, full disclosure provides investors with all of the information regarding a company or other investment so that he or she can make an informed decision on whether to invest or not. It is an example of choice engineering: you provide them with information that would help them make choices that would increase productivity rather than simply urging them to be more productive. Disclosure therapy is not simply disclosing the financial state of the company, it also involves effectively communicating the who, what, when, where and why of the corporate strategy. Most companies are reluctant to release some information to employees such as plans for new product development because fear that their competitive information will be leaked. While we understand the concerns of management in regards to the security of this type of information; however, the advantages of disclosing information to their teams should team would outweigh the risks of leaking this information to competitors. Of course, certain data (personal information, etc.) that must be kept confidential, but data that will provide project teams with a clearer understanding of business opportunities or objectives should be disclosed.

What to do to make your team, your clients, and your boss happy

What can be done in our organization to us and people around us happy?

1. **Always make sure that people get something more for their work then they had before**. If you do have to reduce compensation or perks, it will make your team members very unhappy often completely out proportion to the reduction. If

you are thinking about trying to save money by removing the coffee machine in the lunch room, think carefully about how much you will save because saving a couple of hundred dollars on a relatively cheap benefit may cost you magnitudes more in loss productivity from your unhappy team. For the same reason, continuous increases in salary or other measureable benefit are important. If there are no funds available, even small increment in perks will satisfy most people and maintain their level of happiness. A twenty-fifty dollar gift certificate every quarter may add the same amount of happiness as a small, but more expensive salary increase. The amounts we are discussing here are really quite trivial, but companies tend to ignore this simple rule because of an illusion: it is much easier to count money saved than to calculate money lost due to lost productivity.

2. **Avoid habituation**. If you have a team member who has worked on the same the same type of projects for many years, their interest or enthusiasm is probably waning regardless how interesting the project may actually be. If you are a project manager, try to manage the project differently, better than the previous one. Also try to assign people to different tasks and duties. Every member of your team will be happier.

3. **Try to create memorable events.** Remember how time appears to go faster the longer we live? This is caused by routine and if it continues unabated for years we become unhappy. As a project manager, send your team member to a conference, ask them to write a paper for a journal, or ask them to do a client presentation, anything that would break the routine and create a memorable event. Even a simple lunch or other team building events will help you out in this regard. .

4. **Properly manage expectations.** Do not tell your manager that you can do work faster than is realistically possible. Any discrepancy between expectation and reality makes people unhappy. Do not promise that the snow removal machine you are designing will also clean the sidewalk (unless of course it can); instead, say that the chance that the sidewalk will be cleaner will increase/ cleaner sidewalk will increase. By using "probabilistic language" you will be more accurate, manage expectations, and everyone will be happier with the final product.

What to Do Make Yourself Happy and Spread Virus of Happiness

By now it should be clear that organizational engineering is really about happiness. The goal is to "engineer" a happy project team. Happy project teams are highly correlated with successful projects. 50% of our own happiness is completely dependent upon our genetic inheritance. But that means that 50% isn't and you can do something to increases your happiness (Moskowitz 2010; Lyubomirsky, Schkade and Sheldon 2005).

1. **Be grateful and say nice things to your team members**. People who were asked to write letters of gratitude to other people reported a lasting increase in happiness – extending over weeks and even months – after implementing the habit. Interestingly, sending the letter was not necessary, even when people wrote letters but never delivered them, they still reported better feeling.

2. **Start imagining better future and write it down**. If you start imagining a better future, for example, living with a loving partner, having good job, and then leave a strong imprint of this imagination in your memory, you will begin to feel better. Writing down your vision of a happy future, this will create a much stronger impression and have a greater positive effect on your happiness.

3. **Write down three good things that have happened with you every week.** If you focus on the positive, it will help you to remember reasons to be glad.

4. **Help somebody else.** Helping someone else will boost your own happiness and vice versa. Executives that have to fire somebody are usually much less happy than a project engineer who spent some extra time helping their colleagues to learn a new skill.

Happiness can act like a virus that can spread throughout a social group, including your project team. As a project manager, if you are able to make yourself happy, you can "infect" the rest of your team. Therefore your own feelings are not a completely private matter: your happiness may be the key to your project team's success.

Smart Tips:

The dominant corporate culture found in most large businesses leads to employee disengagement, and as a result, loss of company productivity. Choice engineering can help to alleviate this problem. Key strategies include:

- Disclosure therapy – provide clear information about business in clear format when individual would see our project success would be attributed to the personal efforts;

- Incremental improvement - make sure that your team members receive an incremental increase in monetary or non-monetary compensation.

- Stay happy yourself and spread virus of happiness in your organization.

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