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Management Support of The Team Assignment Process

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Introduction

The Team Assignment Process (TAP) has been used in industry to support the development of high-per-formance teams (Janzon, et. al., 1996). In order to use the TAP effectively, what is needed is an organizational approach that includes management as part of the team-based development environment (Morhman, et al, 1995; Schrage, 1995). This paper focuses on the management aspect of supporting work teams using the TAP.

The TAP is a structured process whereby teams complete an assignment in three phases: initiation, execution, and conclusion. These phases provide a development environment whereby teams have decision-making ability within the scope of their team assignment. Each of the phases is briefly described.

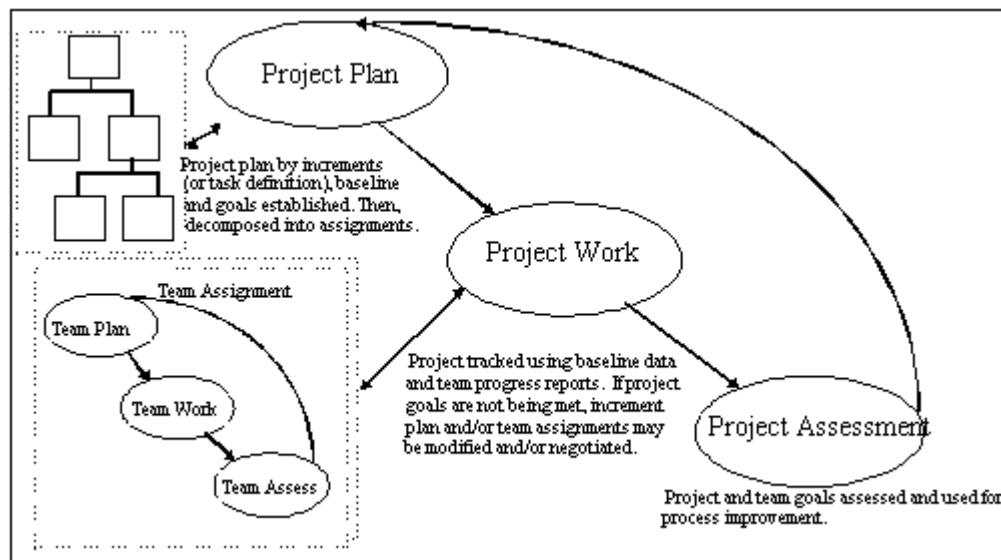


Figure 1: Management and Team Relationship Using TAP

Initiation - The team is given an assignment and analyzes it in order to define requirements, a baseline, goals, deliverables and team routines. These are compiled in a team plan which may be negotiated with management when there is a lack of resources, time, or expertise.

Execution - The team works on its assignment and reports progress on its team goals. The team or management may initiate renegotiation of the team plan when necessary.

Conclusion : The team compiles team experiences including lessons learned and best practices and communicates them to management and other teams for future improvement.

Management Support

The management activities associated with the TAP as presented in Figure 1, provide a structured approach to achieving project and organizational goals. The management of the TAP includes both the project and the organization (typically represented as a line structure) in order to balance short-term (project) and long-term (individual, management, and organization) goals. Table 1 summarizes the responsibilities of management in maintaining a balanced organizational structure.

Table 1: Management and Team Interaction

Project Support:	Organization Support:	Team Assignment Activity:
Project goals and baseline defined. Project is decomposed into set of tasks.	Technical support needed for feasibility assessment of task definitions.	Project schedule and resource requirements identified for specification of team assignment.
Decomposition of task into team assignments and formation of work teams.	Technical support for determining size and complexity of team assignments. Input to team membership.	Completion of team assignment specifications, formation of work teams. Identification of team assignment goals and their relationship to the project goals.
Negotiation of team assignment based on team plan (team baseline, goals, schedule and resource requirements).	Technical expertise provided to the teams in the development of their team plans. Involved in negotiation of team assignment.	Initiation phase whereby teams complete team plans based on the team assignment. The plan is typically reviewed by the line manager before the negotiation process is initiated.
Team progress is tracked against team and project plans. Renegotiation of team plans if goals are not met, task is redefined, features are dropped, etc.	Technical expertise is provided when needed by the teams. May include input to the technical quality of deliverables.	Execution phase whereby teams are reporting progress and receive feedback on quality, TTM, and other goals. Parties renegotiate the team plan when major deviations occur.
Analysis of team and management performance	Participation in the findings and assessment	Teams summarize best and worst practices, lessons learned, and

is done at the conclusion of the team assignment. Findings used for future projects.	of individual, project, and organizational goals.	other information that would be used for future improvements.
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This work balance is a shift from traditional organizations that decompose work and assign it in a hierarchical fashion. It requires effective integration and communication across the organization and as a result focuses on trust and commitment by three parties in order to accomplish common goals (Figure 2).

In order to assess project and team goals, it is important to develop a baseline at the team and project levels. Common goals and metrics for assessing them may be established using an appropriate technique such as the Goal Question Metric (GQM) approach (Basili, 1992). Then, team progress reporting would include objective and subjective data necessary for ongoing feedback on the successful completion of the project.

It is important to note that the TAP focuses on team empowerment in order to allow for management by objectives at all levels. This is accomplished by allowing teams to manage their work by developing team plans, tracking their progress according to the metrics that have been established, initiating renegotiation when necessary (schedule delays, quality, or performance issues at the team level as well as when management changes impact team goals), problem solving and presenting tentative solutions to management and external resources, making adjustments to their schedule, handling risks, and identifying future improvements, among other team activities.

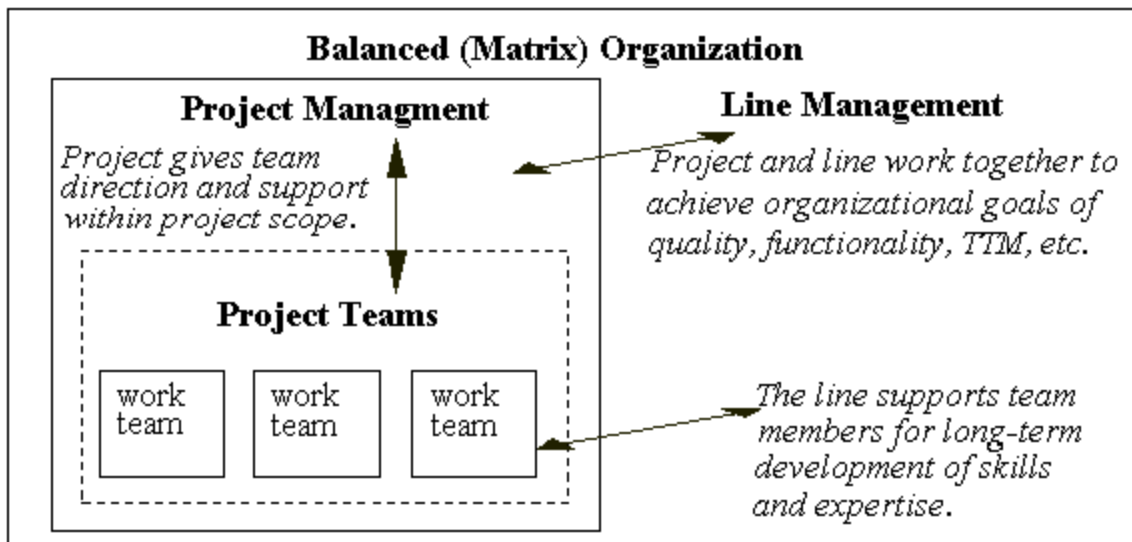


Figure 2: Organization Structure to Support TAP

Tools and Techniques

It was found that management support of work teams required a set of tools and techniques for achieving common goals. Important graphic tools include project/product increments, project/team task decomposition, organization charts, schedules (PERT and/or GANTT charts) and others that make visible the roles and responsibilities of teams and management.

For ongoing project development, an experience factory may be appropriate whereby projects can be assessed with information gathered on other projects. The GQM approach allows for objective and subjective data gathering pertinent to the development of an experience factory.

Teams also benefit greatly from these visual tools and techniques. Teams have access to timely information that impact their decision-making capabilities within the scope of team assignments. When information is made readily accessible, teams have a wealth of knowledge upon which to assess work dependencies on other teams (based on team schedules and work breakdowns), evaluate performance, quality, and resource utilization relative to other teams and the project as a whole, learn about solutions applied by other teams, and evaluate risks within and external to their team assignments.

Other tools and techniques are summarized in Table 2. These tools primarily focused on establishing communication among all parties as teams were geographically distributed within and across sites. Communication tools included innovative approaches using the WEB, spatial areas, charts and graphs, and others. For example, a room or wall is used to display project goals, team progress, problem areas, and any pertinent information for all three parties. As teams report their progress, it may be appropriate to display lessons learned and best and worst practices. The visualization of the project in terms of its components (team assignments) shows team dependencies and necessary interactions.

Lessons Learned

Other organizational structures may evolve as a result of a project-driven environment and the traditional line structure found in parts of the organization. These structures may be acceptable as long as long-term objectives are met (e.g., long-term technical competence is maintained) and project goals are achieved (e.g., effective teamwork).

Communication tools must allow for two-way communication in order for teams and management to share information in a collaborative fashion. The visualization tools and WEB structure have played an integral role in building team and management commitment.

References

References are provided upon request..

Table 2: Tools and Techniques for Management Support of TAP

Organizational Objective:	Tool or Technique:
Communication mechanism for geographically dispersed teams.	Intranet progress reporting (via an intranet structure) for easy, fast information management.
Fast and efficient communication of project status.	Kick-off, Stand-up meetings used for interaction among parties followed by discussion, questions, comments.
Visualization of team and project estimated and actual progress.	Visual space where project information is displayed. Information may include project and team baseline data, construction plan, project and team progress reports (quality, schedules).
External feedback on team solutions.	1/3 presentation meeting allows for presentation and discussion of proposed solution.
Relationship of line, project, and team membership.	Organization structure showing the relationships and communication channels of management and teams.
Opportunity for reward and recognition.	Newsletter, bulletin board, suggestion box and other mechanisms that share best practices, lessons learned and other information that imparts knowledge and recognition.