Session 14: Human factors & personnel issues

Professionalism & opposing attitudes
Dealing with organizational politics
Building a staff
Handling termination
Legal issues

Attitudes found in organizations

- Professional
  See www.idinews.com/professionalism.pdf

- Unprofessional
  What's the difference?

- Antiprofessional

People obstacles in an organization

- **Unprofessional** people
  - Came up through the ranks
  - Learned on the job
  - Never studied or thought much about principles, methods, techniques

- **Antiprofessional** people
  - Suspicious of (even hostile to) specialists
  - Eager to discredit the professional staff, consultants
  - Negative reaction to anything professionals propose

  *Systems analysts and I.T. management have to work effectively with both.*

FEAR

- Unprofessional people at all levels may fear that the new system will make their job trivial or even unnecessary.
  - They may feel pride in having mastered some dull, repetitive process. They're **indispensable**!
  - Telling them that the wonderful advanced new system will do all that automatically only reinforces their fear.
  - The **project manager** must understand those feelings and make the team member feel that he or she is now and will continue to be an important part of the new system.

  *How?*
Instilling Professionalism in an organization requires:
- Professional people
- Professional environment, infrastructure, support

Both are needed!

Building the staff screening applicants:

Professional:
- Seek top quality (85th percentile or better)
- Question applicants in depth to elicit free responses
- Examine samples of applicants’ work
- “Theory Y” (McGregor, MIT)

Non-professional:
- Seek specific skills (prog. language, etc.) experience
- Question applicants about detailed tools & techniques
- A programmer is a programmer!
- “Theory X”

Organization’s environment:

Professional:
- Staff encouraged to contribute ideas & state opinions
- Flexible working hours
- Staff encouraged to participate in professional societies, write articles, attend meetings, etc.
- Most projects well-planned, done in an orderly manner, complying with standard methodology.

Non-professional:
- Those who offer unsolicited views seen as malcontents, troublemakers
- Rigid hours + overtime
- Outside activities mustn’t interfere with work assignments, and mustn’t use company resources
- Important projects done in “crash: mode; pressure to set aside standards in order to “get the job done”.

Most organizations are not 100% one or the other (but they may strive to be).

Organization’s methodology:

Professional:
- Results oriented
- Emphasis on quality
- Flexible conventions & guidelines
- Friendly & respectful style
- Broad participation in both proposing & reviewing
- Emphasis on what one must know to do a superior job
- Management trusts the staff to meet commitments and use sound judgment consistent with their level of experience. (“Theory Y”)

Non-professional:
- Activity oriented
- Emphasis on uniformity
- Mandatory standards cover almost all activities.
- Military tone (the rules)
- Standards committee or “methodology czar”
- Emphasis on satisfying enforcement & audit
- Management expects the professional staff to be lazy and to cheat whenever they get the chance. (“Theory X”)
Organizational politics

- Some staff members care more about what's best for their individual status and advancement than about what's best for the organization.
- Such people may oppose any change proposed by their "rivals" and hope for failure! ("I told you so!")
- Some of them are conservative old-timers, "We've always done it that way."
- Others are overambitious younger people, on the "fast-track"

Reasons for terminating an employee

- Chronic incompetence
  - Faulty work
  - Overrunning estimates
- Laziness, indifference
  - "I only work here"
- Dishonesty
  - Misleading status reports
  - Concealing mistakes
  - Shifting blame

Minimizing exposure to a dishonest team member

- **Binary** status reports
  - an assigned task is either done
    - with expected deliverables available
  - or it isn't
    - with definite estimates for remaining cost & time
- Tasks have **short** duration estimates
- They can fool us for a week or two, but not for half a year.

Giving a reference for a terminated employee

- Companies sometimes worry about litigious (disgruntled) former employees
  - Lawsuit alleging illegal discrimination
  - Complaints to EEO
- Therefore they may set a policy:
  "We'll confirm that he/she worked here in a given position at certain dates, but we don't comment on performance, quality of work, or the cause of leaving."
  (But we may nevertheless somehow manage to convey our assessment.)
Is *non-professional* approach to computing ever appropriate?

- Rigid policies imposed from parent company or other outside source, e.g. below average salary ranges.
- Ingrained management style, emphasizing snap judgments over rational decisions.
- Expected continuing decline in business; lack of new applications
- Ultraconservative top management resistant to change.
- Tenured staff lacking upgrade potential.

*But would you want to work there?*