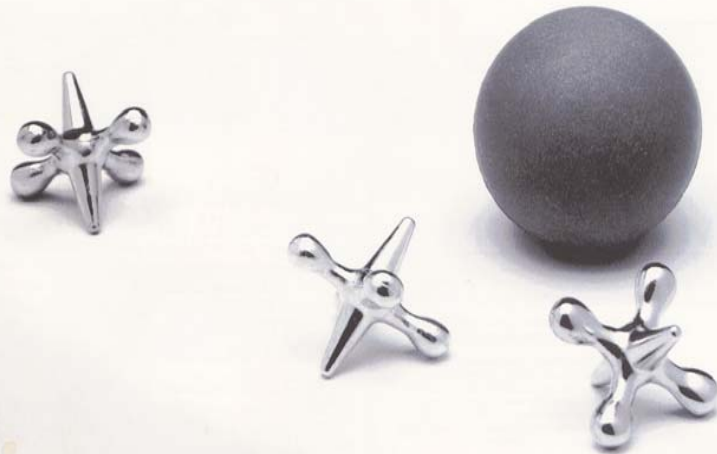


Strategic Choices



Organizational Engineering Designing the A/E Dream Team

PUBLISHED REPRINT

By Catalina Parada and Jeffrey Miller

Organizational Engineering

Designing the A/E Dream Team

The Playing Field

Perhaps more than in any other business, firms in the built environment deliver service by working in groups or teams. Where else do you see so many diverse talents joined together—creative, administrative, and technical. This team is focused on one common purpose, shares one common destiny, and is often conquering the same nerve-racking deadline-together.

Using OE, you can anticipate how a particular group will respond when bound by a shared aim and outcome

Anyone who has been around a while will tell you, "as goes the team, so goes the job." As an industry, we have experience in working together to design and engineer the homes, business and commercial environments, sports complexes, transportation facilities, and the myriad of infrastructure that shape the world around us. But do we really understand what is at the nucleus of designing practical, usable, human structures—the professional teams that make it all happen?

Organizational Engineering (OE) offers a new way of looking at how people perform in groups. This revolutionary technology avoids psychological tools and tricks. It concerns itself with how people behave, not how

they think. Using Organizational Engineering, you can anticipate how a particular group will respond when bound by a shared aim and outcome. And you can redirect the group's behavior by changing only the relationship that binds them, not the people themselves. The result is being able to tap in to the best of the best from diverse talents and personalities that comprise the typical A/E firm.

The Challenge

Analyzing how an A/E firm ticks presents us with quite a continuum. At one end, the firm is charged with specifying a final product, let's say a building, composed of many parts and materials that must "fit together" with watchmaker precision. At the other end of the spectrum the A/E must attract and satisfy clients who view the end product as a vehicle for realizing their own internal values and personal ambitions. The continuum runs the gamut from nebulous or "fuzzy" to an unyielding instrument of laser-like exactness. Adding to the formula is the environment of tight deadlines and substantial financial commitments under which the A/E must operate and be constantly measured by performance. Viewed from the perspective of an organizational engineer, a typical A/E firm is a curious, diverse, and sometimes contradictory instrument that must work under microscopic scrutiny. And you wonder why managing your firm is an unending challenge.

The Technique

Organizational Engineering is a new discipline conceived and tested by Dr. Gary

Salton, of Ann Arbor, Michigan. He is the author of *Organizational Engineering: A New Method of Creating High Performance Human Structures*. This technology, when applied to human organizations, produces material and visible improvements in performance.

One of Salton's fundamental discoveries is that people must adopt an information processing strategy in order to "make sense" out of the mass of information available. These strategies neatly divide into four basic categories, each of which contributes something unique to the functioning of a group. In what category might your engineers and architects fit?

One From Column A . . .

Depending on the situations we face individually, at some point in time each of us will "mix and match" a combination of these strategic postures into our own behavioral repertoire. In practice, however, we tend to favor one or two styles over others. The relationships among these styles can be graphically expressed in a four-quadrant model, with the area in each quadrant representing the probability of the person electing that particular processing pattern in any specific instance. (See Figure Upper Right)

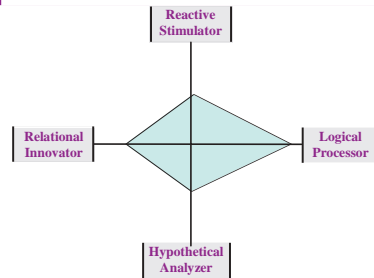
Garbage In/Garbage Out

In a group, everybody's output is someone else's input. If one person's output preferences are a poor match with the input needs of another, the group's efficiency and effectiveness are at risk. In a firm, these input/output relationships form chains that can be analyzed and charted to reveal profiles of entire groups, with their strengths and vulnerabilities clearly mapped.

Defining the Fuzzy Side of the House

We will fondly refer to the front line representative in an A/E firm as the Client Contact. Treading a fine line of information

Although we mix and match any number of these profiles, our tendency is to favor one or two styles over the others.



Reactive Stimulator

The RS is an action oriented individual. His/her tendency is to react immediately to situations. Highly focused on the task at hand, RS types typically seek immediate results.

Logical Processor

The LP is logical, methodical, and not easily deterred. He/she is naturally detail oriented and works best in situations where assignments are clear and precise. Preferring well-defined expectations, LP's tend to favor postures of "do it once and do it right."

Hypothetical Analyzer

The HA is a problem solver. He/she enjoys complexity and the challenge of solving a difficult problem. Comfortable perfecting a program and/or process, HA's primary concern is identifying the best way to address a situation.

Relational Innovator

The RI is an idea-generator. Relationships between divergent ideas and situations are quickly identifiable. Focusing on creativity, the RI readily integrates new concepts, ideas and innovations into coherent theories and systems.

gatherer, mind reader, and creator of miracles, the Client Contact must successfully navigate the divergent interests of the client and filter through the most critical intelligence. The client has more on her plate than communicating with the A/E. Project financing, moving schedules, furniture requirements, other projects, and administrative demands all compete with the needs of

the A/E firm for the client's attention. Often, the Client Contact must be able to reach decisions and respond with minimal information.

Speed of response is also essential to the "fuzzy" end of the business. Playing miracle worker, Client Contacts must be able to meet or exceed customer's schedule expectations sometimes within accelerated or fast track time frames which must be supported by the technical side of the house. The client must have confidence that your firm:

- understands their requirements
- has an appropriate, achievable concept for meeting their needs
- can get the job done without torturing them with details

That'll be an RS/RI Combo to Go

In Salton's theory, the Client Contact element of the team ideally calls for a combination of the Reactive Stimulator (RS) and Relational Innovator (RI) strategic styles. A Reactive Stimulator posture is characterized by a "satisficing" (satisfying/sufficing) strategy involving minimum information input needs and an output focused on expedient "good enough" solutions. Relational Innovator strategies also require minimum detail input in addition to providing creative, but unproven, results. This combination of RS/RI styles satisfies the client with quick response time as well as interesting, innovative solutions to their concerns.

Reality Sets In

Governed by a different environment, the technical side of the team must translate commitments of the Client Contact into a tangible product with a high degree of reliability. As detail becomes critical to design, technical staff must synthesize knowledge from many sources into an integrated, cohesive whole that will actually function, once constructed. These people would likely be of

the Hypothetical Analyzer/Logical Processor (HA/LP) persuasion.

The Balancing Act

The "fuzzy" and "hard" ends of the A/E instrument, although recognizing the need for and appreciating the importance of the other, sometimes have a tough time working together. Each perspective and approach have a place on the team but there may be times when they are at odds with one another.

Trying to impose the technical side's information processing preferences on the Client Contact typically results in failure as the client turns to another firm whose demands are fewer and response is quicker. Imposing the Client Contact's information processing style on the technical side may also spell failure. The end product is likely to leave much to be desired. (Figure A)

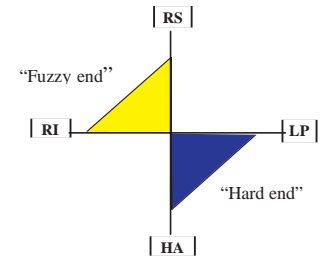


Figure A
Each perspective, whether "Fuzzy" or "Hard" has a place on the team.

The Valerio Dewalt Train Associates Experience

Valerio Dewalt Train Associates, a prominent architectural practice in Chicago, graciously agreed to undergo the neutron microscope test by providing access to a unit of the firm. The unit is comprised of a team of four technical professionals headed by a Technical Manager and one Client Contact/Project Manager. (Figure B)

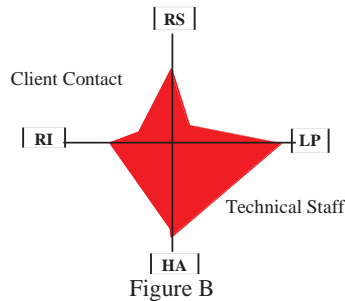


Figure B
The make-up of the Valerio Dewalt Train case study team.

As Salton's theory suggests, Valerio Dewalt Train's Client Contact/Project Manager occupies a position more in the RS/RI quadrant—minimum detail, fast response, innovative ideas. The technical staff's primary orientation is in the HA/LP zone. It is characterized by attention to detail, careful study, and deliberately focused progress. Because more information is being processed, the theory predicts that the technical staff will move slower than the Client Contact. (Figure C)

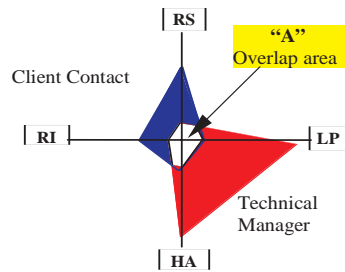


Figure C
The minimal area of overlap between the Client Contact/Project Manager and Technical Manager indicates commonality in communication styles.

The "natural" direction for this group is indicated by the minimal area of overlap shown as "A". Though there is some degree of commonality, communication between these two individuals may run into snags. The Client Contact/Project Manager focuses on speedy, tangible, near-term results.

Conversely, the Technical Manager's emphasis is on precision, predictability, and perfection. While the Client Contact/Project Manager prefers short, intense communication bursts, the Technical Manager is partial to complete information, logically presented in a measured and consistent stream. Sound familiar?

Acting as the prime conduit between the architects and the Client Contact/Project Manager, the Technical Manager has the opportunity to affect communication flow. He will tend to reframe the Client Contact's contributions in terms of specifics such as "what" tasks need to be accomplished. As the communications filter, the Technical Manager will also be able to impart the "whys"—possibly diminishing the value that the Client Contact puts on speed and tangible, shorter-term results.

Not surprisingly, the architectural team profile strongly resembles that of the Technical Manager. Displayed as a group, the following composite profile emerges: (figure "D")

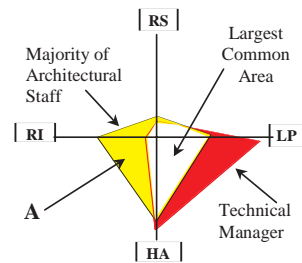


Figure D
The architectural staff tends to place a higher value on creativity and novel approaches than does the Technical Manager as denoted by "A".

Speaking the Same Language (Sometimes)

The largest area of strategic overlap describes the kind of communications and behaviors the staff and manager will find mutually appealing. Within this area, the

Technical Manager and staff are likely to "intuitively understand" one another. Little information will be lost and a high degree of mutual appreciation is likely to be evident.

The majority of the architectural staff that falls on the RI/RS side suggests that the staff would want to explore new options to a greater extent than will be comfortable to the Technical Manager. The relationship between the technical staff and the manager would probably benefit if the staff were allowed latitude to explore these options.

When the Technical Manager is removed from the equation, and we just compare architectural staff with the Client Contact/Project Manager, the two sides of the house demonstrate an even higher degree of commonality. (Figure E)

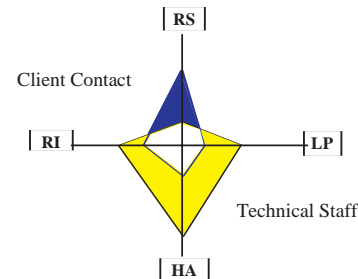


Figure E
More commonality is seen between the technical group and Client Contact/Project Manager when the Technical Manager is removed from the equation.

This graphically demonstrates that if the Client Contact/Project Manager works through staff, rather than through the technical manager, there would be a slightly higher probability that he group would adopt a more aggressive change orientation (i.e., I have gotten an idea; let's try it). But the more dominant response would be to subject new ideas to massive amounts of analysis (i.e., That's a possibility; let's think about it).

Honesty is the Best Policy

Analysis of the Salton structure suggests that shuffling people around probably will not do much to change the communications of this particular group. In many groups of larger size, however, there may be an opportunity to improve the structure by introducing someone whose profile significantly spans both of the parties involved—an Honest Broker.

The Honest Broker acts as an interpreter, linking the two groups.

The "Honest Broker" acts as an interpreter, linking the two groups. Part of his/her profile, which carries through on the RS dimension, gives a sense of the importance of speed. Extending in to the LP and HA zones demonstrates the value of precision and predictability. In effect, the broker is able to talk to both parties in ways that each can appreciate, while presenting the views of the other. If they possess the right profile, project schedulers and control managers have often been found ideally suited to perform this function.

Other Options for Increased Team Effectiveness

Used as an adjunct to Organizational Engineering, the "Honest Broker" strategy is based on an individual being tasked with keeping the team members in touch, and in sync, with one another. Here, an individual's "natural" tendencies, rather than their speci-

fied roles and responsibilities, are called into play.

Playing by the rules is another strategy that is useful in certain group dynamics, but would not be likely to work in the Valerio Dewalt Train case study. The Client Contact/Project Manager's profile suggests that he is probably not inclined to follow rules—even ones that he has helped to create. Imposing rules in this situation could potentially cause a deterioration, rather than an improvement, in the group performance.

A viable strategy that would be useful in this case study would be the application of "Process." The format in which the two parties interact can be designed to promote communication and coordination. For example, the Client Contact/Project Manager would be required to present his changes and initiatives in frequent formal meetings that occur at specified times and in a designated format. The Technical Manager could review issues with the Client Contact/Project Manager anytime, but not change the ongoing process until the scheduled meeting was held and the group approved the changes and initiatives. This kind of process would introduce a level of structure in an otherwise undisciplined process. Ultimately, the group will benefit in three distinct ways:

- Some incidental initiatives may not be developed to a point where they can be presented at the meeting so that the focus remains on the ultimate goal of best serving the client.
- Other, more critical, issues may be better defined and, therefore, better communicated.
- The structured format could help insure that the ideas are better communicated and, ultimately, acted upon.

Team Performance and Client Satisfaction

Within the A/E industry, team performance is probably the most significant variable in predicting project success and client satisfaction. Depending on the ability of project, finance, marketing, and administrative teams to function well together, entire enterprises either excel or merely survive. The same techniques offer the ability to structure teams for optimum performance, predicting their strengths and vulnerabilities, before putting them to work.

Organizational Engineering has been proven successful in other industries as well. Some organizations who have high accolades for this communications strategy have been building their own internal Dream Teams. The "A-List" includes electrical utilities, manufacturers, communications companies, data processing groups, law firms, non-profit organizations, governmental entities, and universities . . . perhaps some of them are your clients.



Catalina Parada and Jeffery Miller are trained Organizational Engineering practitioners and principals of Jeffery Miller & Associates. Based in the company's Chicago office, Catalina and Jeffery help A/E firms grow by providing tools and services that boost marketing and organizational effectiveness. They welcome questions and comments.

Jeffery Miller & Associates, Inc.
1229 N. Branch Avenue
Chicago, IL 60622

Phone: 312-855-8855

Fax: 312-255-8853

Email: cataparada@aol.com
or jamco@aol.com