

What happens when collaboration isn't working perfectly?

Our client is one of the world's largest oil corporations and is currently extracting hydrocarbon reserves from a major oil field. They had appointed a large contractor to deliver front-end engineering and design for their asset development programme – but half-way through, it became apparent that client and contractor could work more collaboratively in line with one another. What could Thism do to help?

Clearly, this was a sensitive situation and one which required every ounce of our operational experience and inter-personal skills. We began by investigating the project in its entirety, looking at a wide range of documentation from progress reports to organisation charts and even e-mail correspondence. Then we embarked on the lengthy but necessary process of talking, in some depth, to individuals in the client and contractor organisations to ensure both view points and needs were understood and addressed.

We interviewed fifty-two people in all – taking care to cover the widest possible range of functions and length of service on the contract. Our questions were carefully designed to uncover the reality behind the perceptions. Among the issues discussed were: How is this project different from others? How do you know when you've met an objective? How precisely is information distributed?

The report we compiled began with a recognition of what the project partners were doing well. Then, we itemised the areas we thought should be improved.



Some of our recommendations were strategic and addressed the organisational structures of both client and contractor; others were tactical and ranged from longer term initiatives to enhance the Graduate Development Programme to more immediate activity which improved e mail etiquette. This also identified numerous quick wins for consideration by senior managers at Project Planning Workshops.

Our client informed us that we played an important role – and in doing so, helped both sides hone skills and behaviours which would be of great use to them for years to come. It was interesting to note that in this highly technical “leading edge” project operation the softer skills of leadership and the behaviours of all team members to each other were equally important to those of technical excellence.

