

A diverse group of five business professionals (three men and two women) standing in a modern office environment with large windows. They are dressed in professional attire, including suits and blouses. The background shows a bright, airy space with structural beams and glass panels.

# HOW EFFECTIVE IS YOUR PROJECT TEAM?

By Esther Ewing and Bill Sedgwick, Big Tree Strategies

*“An engaged, intentionally effective team can produce great results.” - Deputy Director, Production, large Canadian mining company*

Consider this picture. One of your key projects, a billion-dollar mine development, is struggling. The ore body has been proven and the demanding technical challenges are still being engineered. The problem is that the site is not a happy place. Morale is low and you have lost some key people over the past few months. What's more, team members are confused, deadlines are being missed, and tempers are flaring. On top of all this, more and more time is being spent in meetings that are not productive. To make matters worse, you are starting to see an uptick in safety incidents on the site. What should you do?

In the dynamic commodity market, it has never been more important for your project and operations teams to be effective from the earliest FEL stages through to the end of execution of the project plan and into mine operations. Our company, Big Tree Strategies, has an approach that has proved to help these teams become more effective. It has been used in a number of different companies in the Canadian mining industry.

Over a 12-month period, we conducted research on project teams that were managing large, capital mining operations. We were looking for what made great project teams great. What was happening when the teams were working well? How had they been set up for success? What levers did team leaders pull to ensure success?

We interviewed more than 50 people in the Canadian and global mining industries. This included CEOs, engineers, geologists, project directors, risk managers, safety professionals, HR and finance professionals, and exploration team leaders. What emerged was a robust approach for building effective teams. We call this the Intentional Teams Framework™.

The first step in using this approach is an Intentional Team Assessment in which all members of the team do an online survey about the team's effectiveness. These questions, which really comprise the elements of the Intentional Teams framework, are grouped into four areas:

**1. Compelling Direction.** Does the team have a shared understanding of the work it has to accomplish? Is everyone working off the same plan? Are they aligned with key stakeholders?

**2. Flexible Leadership.** Are the leaders of the team creating and telling a compelling story about why the work of the team is important? Is this inspiring? Do the team leaders tell a consistent story to all audiences

(i.e. team members, contractors and sponsors)? And do they tell it over and over again?

**3. Performance Mindset.** Does the team have a planning mentality, and are all the handoffs clean and smooth across the team? Does the team have a disciplined approach to meetings and to communicating?

**4. One-Team Culture.** What is the culture like on the team? Does the culture add energy to the team or diminish it? Is it a culture of performance?

These four elements are all interdependent. Sometimes you can have one of them working well, such as Compelling Direction, but if the team's leaders aren't flexible or the culture challenges team members to be successful, then you are missing out on some important advantages, and the team will predictably underperform.

A good question to ask is where has the Intentional Teams Framework been applied?

Below are three examples of how we have used this framework with real teams.

## Greenfields project team

This project was about three years into project execution when it had some major technical challenges and a really rough start in bringing the EPCM (Engineering,

## Big Tree Strategies

Esther Ewing and Bill Sedgwick are co-founders and partners of Big Tree Strategies Inc. Big Tree Strategies works with teams that are doing critical work and helps them become more effective and engaged.



Esther Ewing

Esther Ewing has worked for more than 20 years as a consultant with organisations in financial services, healthcare, manufacturing, mining and the legal sector. She is a certified Kolbe Consultant with experience providing leadership development, strategy and coaching teams.



Bill Sedgwick

Within his own consulting business in strategic and business planning, Bill Sedgwick has worked with more than 70 senior teams in many different organisations. He has degrees in business and education from the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa.



Procurement and Construction Management) and the owner's team together on one team. We used the Intentional Teams Assessment and sorted the data into three categories: Senior Management, Middle Management and Other Team Members. Each category was a mixture of EPCM employees and the owner's employees.

The assessment showed that the team had many areas to work on, so the team leaders decided to focus on repairing and bolstering the team culture. Their initial action plans focused on creating a culture that places no blame and that retains high trust, high accountability and a sense of urgency. Over the course of a year, the intent is to focus on the lowest-rated items first, then the next lowest, and so on.

In their 90-day milestone meetings, the team assesses progress and makes action plans for the next quarter. Twelve months later, they will redo the assessment in order to compare their accomplishments to how things used to be. And they will celebrate. The outcomes of this Intentional Teams work include a more facilitative team culture and a working environment that is safer and more fun.

### **Base metals operations**

This operations team in a major mining company had just appointed a new leader. He was creating a new unified team, whereas before they had been a scattered group of local operations leaders and project leaders. But now they all had to work together to make this diverse business succeed.

We were invited in at the beginning of the team's existence and used the Intentional Teams Assessment with all team members. Once the leader and team completed this online they could immediately see where members felt it was successful and where they needed to take action to improve their performance. We worked with this team over a full year, and they put all the building blocks in place to make themselves more effective.

### **Procurement team in a mining company**

An interesting application of the Intentional Teams Framework came about when we were asked to work with the procurement team in a mining company.

This team had a unique challenge. It was a division that procured on behalf of the operations business units and projects, while at the same time it was independent of these business units.

The procurement team members focused first on getting the best deal for the business as a whole, and then on having the equipment or other purchases arrive as quickly as possible.

Of course, those recipients of the purchases saw themselves as internal customers who needed to have the equipment arrive on time. These customers were inconvenienced by delays, which they saw as unnecessary.

This team answered the Intentional Teams Assessment about themselves. Then we

added questions to capture their views on how well they were serving the operations business units and projects.

They reflected on how they could meet their customer needs without sacrificing value to the business as a whole. At this point in time they have not yet fully solved this challenge, but they have a much better understanding of the challenge and how their team can manage it. Also, their operational challenges have eased and they have much smoother handoffs among team members.

### **How is this different from team building?**

The Intentional Teams Framework is not about traditional team building with outdoor exercises and games. It's not about having dinner together. It's about team members defining the real work of the team and identifying how they can best work together more effectively. How the team works together is as important as the work itself, and one facilitates the other.

### **How can you get started with your own team?**

A good first step is taking the free mini-assessment on our website. Or get in touch with us, Esther Ewing or Bill Sedgwick, at [connect@bigtreestrategies.com](mailto:connect@bigtreestrategies.com) and discuss how The Intentional Teams Framework can assist you in getting to greater success.