Chapter 10
Teamwork in the Palestinian IT Industry: The Importance of Context, Cohesiveness, and Commitment

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study explores the role of teams and teamwork in the IT industry in Palestine. The case company (PSC) implemented the use of self-managed, cross-functional teams in order to meet tight budgetary and time constraints for a new software product. PSC considered that the formation of these teams would contribute to improved productivity, ensure high quality outputs, while at the same time meeting the contracted deadlines. However, an evaluation of the success or otherwise of the initiative highlighted the importance of ensuring the type of team formed is appropriate to the context and culture in which the organization is situated. In addition, the case highlights the importance of management commitment to ensure a high level of cohesiveness is fostered through the proactive use of team formation and development processes.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

The Palestine Software Company (PSC) is a ten year old software outsourcing company in the West Bank of the Palestinian Territories. PSC is affiliated with international IT companies headquartered primarily in North America. While these partners have branches in Asia and Western Europe, the establishment of offices and outsourcing relationships in the Middle East are a relatively new venture for the majority of these firms. Therefore, there is a level of responsibility on all parties to ensure these relationships are successful. Consequently, this places considerable pressure on PSC to maintain the highest standards possible, while at the same time ensuring software development is cost effective.

The primary aim of PSC is to develop high-specification software to drive high performing digital hardware componentry. The absence of large –scale manufacturing, particularly of digital hardware, in Palestine, means that the domestic market for PSC's product is virtually non-existent. Therefore, PSC is dependent on its collaborative international relationships in order to develop and sell its product. These relationships and the ability of the company to develop leading edge, high quality software products provides PSC with a competitive advantage in the Middle East. As industry commentators have noted "we must now realize that software drives hardware - and I don't mean that in the obvious sense; I mean that production and manufacturing of hardware now depends more on software development than on all other R & D" (Bridgewater, 2010). Therefore, it can be argued that PSC's success is dependent on its ability to provide innovative, creative software solutions for its clients.

PSC has a formalized hierarchical structure, with a sales and marketing department, administration and related functional areas. Employees are all masters or Ph.D. graduates with specializations in computer engineering, science and IT, electrical engineering and other disciplines. In total, PSC has a staff of fifty. In order to compete in the international arena, PSC has adopted a continuous improvement focus with respect to its software development. The goal of PSC is to deliver products with as few 'bugs' as possible. 'Bug' is a term used in the software industry to describe a malfunction in the software program. Within PSC, this is achieved through both automated and manual testing of software products from both the server and user perspective. The company projects include but are not limited to software design, quality assurance services and data integration services. Unfortunately, often these bugs do not become evident until after the software is launched. Therefore, the challenge is to create a corporate culture that focuses on the delivery of software products that have minimal or zero bugs through the use of relevant, rigorous testing and quality assurance processes.