EFFICIENT TEAMWORK PERFORMANCE ON ORGANISATION CULTURE IN CONSTRUCTION

S. Binil Sundar*

ABSTRACT:

A few surveys in the past have revealed that 'being a team player' was one of the most important factors in getting ahead in the workplace. Successful teamwork is urgently important in any organizations; especially design and construction company where the whole idea of project is based on team and common goal achievement. This journal deals with description of the Structure and Culture of the chosen organization. It talks about basic structure and hierarchy of Firm X with also focuses on the firm being a Prospector following Adhocracy as generic structure focusing completely on innovation and creativity. Besides that being a project based organizations, it briefly describes the organization capability. It also talks about Organization Model and Firm X being both Explorative and Exploitative in the field on Knowledge Capital. Talking about Culture, the report deals with National and Company culture where in it follows the Clan Culture. Also this paper deals with Team and Team Performance; herein one particular project of Circuit House is widely described. Within that the different parameters of team performance is being written about, from formation of the team to balanced team, then the life cycle of the team, division of work in the organizations and for that particular project. It also tells about barriers and enablers for the project. Talking about barriers, some key issues are identified like strategic, cultural and organization based. Any team work is incomplete about the team leader, hence the importance of the team leader in the chosen organization. The learning pattern used in the organization and importance and involvement of the client in the project. This part also reflects a very brief idea about tradition and innovation and how they go hand in hand.

Key words: Culture, Organization, Performance, Teamwork, Knowledge.

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1. Introduction:

A leading architectural historian Dr. Spiro Kostof once gave a famous quote- "Architecture is a social act and the material theater of human activity". Describing architecture as social act reinforces the fact that how much architecture is not only about an individual but a society as a whole. Each and every architecture firm, be it large or small, raring to go and believing in itself that maybe it can make difference.

The one I worked for had similar agenda too, making a difference, let's call it Firm X. Situated in a reputed location of the country; Firm X was really putting its step forward in making difference in environmental issues and dealing with the word "sustainable". The Main Architect was prominent in his field, but one thing never failed to notice was whenever project was successful, he would always express his gratitude towards his project team, making realize how much a team is important in delivering any project. Firm X can be categorized under a small scale architectural firm; calling it small construction knowledge- intensive professional firm (SCKIPSF) wouldn't be wrong as mentioned by Lu and Sexton (2006) where the keywords are knowledge- intensive, innovation, small enterprise and professional service firms.

Structure and Culture

Structure: Any organization structure is grouping of different bodies that come together and contribute for one common goal. Different goal keeps coming at the various stages of the life of organization and it can be same set of different set of people making up a team or acting individually to complete the required goal.

1. The basic keywords in any architectural firm would be "Project and Creation".

    a. Firm X Structure (Figure 1):

        i. Main Architect

        ii. Associate Architects

        iii. Freelance Architects

        iv. Architects (Recently passed out students)

        v. Trainees

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vi.   Draftsmen

vii.   Product Designer/ Graphic Designer

viii.   Quantity & Surveying

ix.   Administration Staffs

x.   General Staffs

b.   Main Architect heads the Firm, Associate Architects were hired according to their specialization and qualifications, for example, one Associate Architect handled only Conservation projects and other handled Energy Efficient related work. The third Associate was more into designing resorts and holiday homes. Each Associate Architects were given trainees to work under and gain knowledge.

c.   Freelance Architects used to visit office whenever required and basically worked from homes and submitted design. Their works in office were handled by few trainees and Architects.

d.   Quantity & Surveying used to cater to all in the office. Administration Staffs consisted of receptionist, main administration body and lawyer.
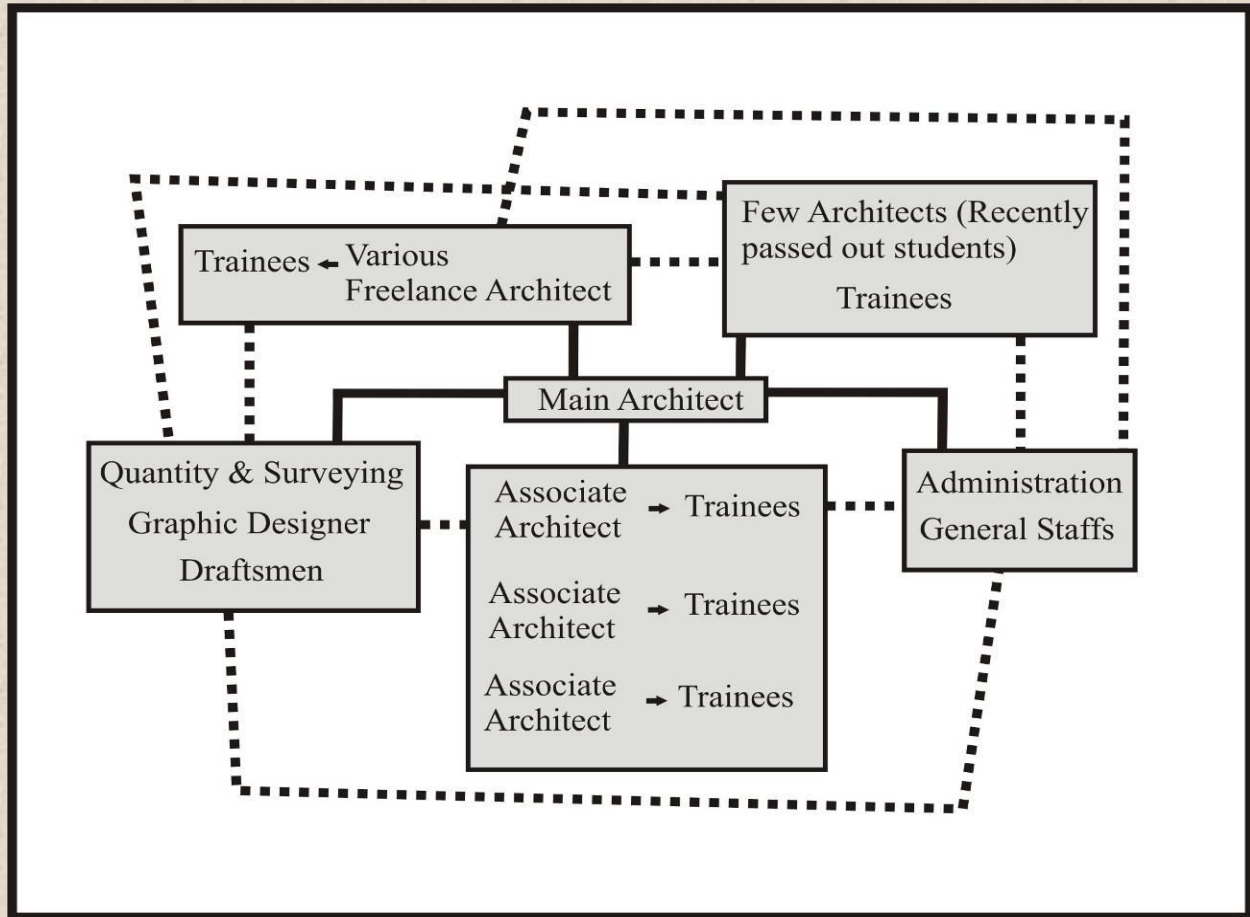
Figure 1: Firm X Structure: Close Interactive Based

2. Miles and Snow (1978) suggest four types of generic business strategies namely Prospectors, Defenders, Analyzer's and Reactors, where each strategies has their own set of business do's and don'ts.

    a. Firm X would fall under Prospectors as it would continuously look out for exploiting new technologies and market opportunities.

    b. Each project would be handled in its own way and study is being done on the location of the project and its prospects beforehand.

3. As per Mintzberg (1989), talking about key organization generic structure, Firm X is Adhocracy organization.
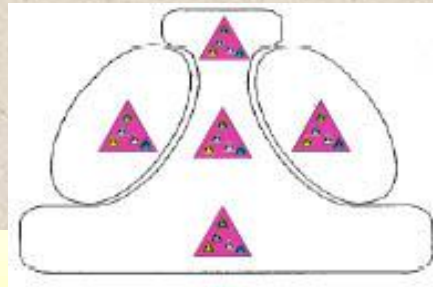

Figure 2: Decentralization

a. Adhocracy organization is the one where the focus is on innovation and creation. Likewise Firm X, the important decisions was taken with the help of support staff along with all important members of the office.

b. The power over different decision is dispersed and widely spread in the organization making it a selective vertical and horizontal decentralization (Figure 2).

c. Communication used to in between two or more people either formally or informally to coordinate between works.

d. All the members of the organization was treated equally and given equal opportunity to tell their valued opinions.

4. Organizational Capability of Firm:

a. Project based system, where in correct knowledge and skills are required to perform the given tasks.

b. Firm X chooses the people according to their experience or knowledge, as described earlier Associates are given work and divided according to their best foot forward in respect to Project. Associate were given authority to decide and act upon their full right on the benefit of the Project.

c. Strong client focus was one of the main objectives. All people associated in the project shared a common goal and responded to project be it any changes or deviations. If needed specialists were hired for special tasks.

d. Generally many organization focuses on either moving into market base or expanding their knowledge base. Firm X was somewhere in between which tried to explore both the bases: market and knowledge (Figure 3).
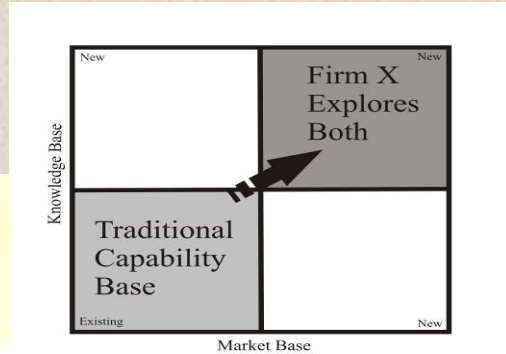

Figure 3: Firm X base movement

5. Organization Model:

a. Lu and Sexton (2006) has described upon three types of assets in organization model and their inter relation with each other and also their impact on knowledge capital (Figure 4). These are:

   i. Relationship Capital (RC) - includes relationship and interactions with clients, alliance members and supply chain partners, as well as image and reputation.

   ii. Human Capital (HC) – individuals working in an organization, their abilities and skills in creating value for the organizations and its client.

   iii. Structure Capital (SC) – systems, processes for codifying and storing knowledge from individual, organization and supply chain partners.
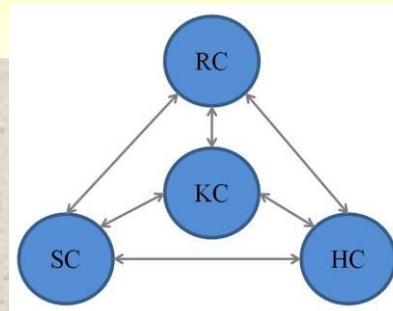

Figure 4: Organization Model

b. Idea of Explorative and Exploitative Innovation with respect to Organization Model in Firm X:

    i.   Explorative: In Firm X, Client focus was major point. Project was important and so were project specific solutions of the problem which used to cleared via up to date meetings with organization members involved in the project. Similarly important was used to come up with new designs and concepts for the project (Figure 5).
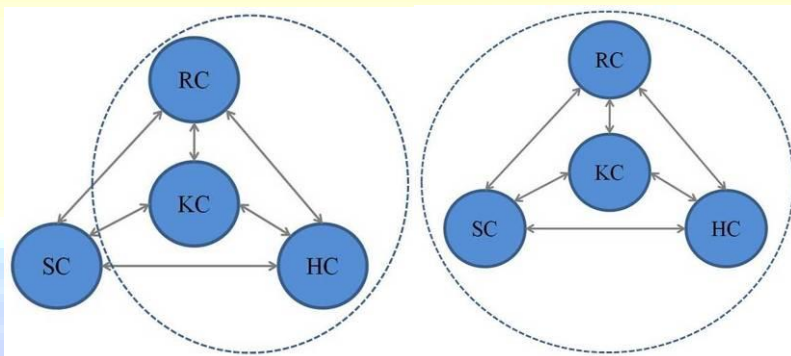

Figure 5: Explorative Innovation   Figure 6: Exploitative Innovation

    ii.   Exploitative: Firm X heavily emphasized on internal organization and general client development too. There was focus on structure capital too (Figure 6). Once in a week seminars used to happen in organizations with the aim of exchanging ideas on various topic. Similarly, interim review of the project also took placed consisting what went well and what did not in the previous project.

2. Culture:

Kluckhohn (1951, p.86) stated that "Culture consists in patterned ways of thinking, feeling and reacting, acquired and transmitted mainly by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values". Culture can be very subjective matter; it can be distinguished according to tradition, geographical, individual and even by organization or company.

1. Hofstede (2001) mentions about culture variations through various data collection he did on basis of Power Distance, Uncertainty Avoidance, Individualism, Masculinity and Femininity, Long- Versus Short- Term Orientation. This is all geographical or national based culture difference where each country has different view considering their life long traditions and its impact (**Key Issues**: Culture 1-5).

India, where Firm X is based is known for its' own cultures and traditions for years.

    a. Power Distance: It basically means human equality, for example inequality on the basis of prestige, power or wealth even. India would feature high on Power Distance and similarly Firm X too. There is this concept of Boss being head and having this fear against him/her everywhere.

    b. Uncertainty Avoidance: Low Uncertainty Avoidance was part of Firm X with less focus on employment stability, generation gap. The practice was more informal and was lower need of security. For example, the Firm X main door key was given to trainees, where in they could come any time in office to work besides office hours. Open for more possibilities and ambiguous situations and was accepted too.

    c. Individualism and Collectivism: India, as country totally believes in Collectivism. It believes that not only collectivism gives more output but also the much needed security when you are in a group. Firm X, similarly had concept of Collectivism, it believed working together in a group leads to high output level, not only that even the promotions was based on tenure and patronage more than merit of an individual.

    d. Masculinity and Femininity: This one is the only criteria in which India scored high on Masculinity according to Hofstede (2001), which does not match with Firm X, which believed in equal opportunities with less differentiation between men and women. To think of it, Firm X had more women employer than men. The location of Firm X in India also played a far greater role in this criteria considering Firm was situated in relaxed tourist place, therefore

emphasis was not much on earnings and recognitions. Firm more emphasized on group making decisions and quality of life with low job stress.

e. Long- Versus Short- Term Orientation: Likewise India, Firm X also a part of Long – Term Orientation attributes which focuses on future, thrift and persistence. Firm X all data used to be saved as such for future references and help around. Similarly, every project they handled initially followed tried and tested path with less risk taking and later ventured more after getting confident of it.

Firm X
1. High Power Distance
2. Low Uncertainty Avoidance
3. Collectivism
4. Masculinity/ Femininity: In between
5. Long Term Orientation

2. Company Culture in Firm X (Cameron and Quinn, 1999): Firm X belongs to The Clan Culture; the atmosphere was totally friendly, where people share a lot of themselves. The office people stayed behind working hours and talked about not only professional but private lives too, something like an extended family. But at the same time, it was partly The Hierarchy Culture too considering that it had few set of rules to be followed for the employees, though not very hard ones in true with The Hierarchy Culture (**Key Issues**: Culture 6).

Team Working and Performance

Oxford Dictionary states definition of Team as "A number of persons associated in some joint action; now esp. a definite number of persons forming a side in a match, in any team sport; hence, a group collaborating in their professional work or in some enterprise or assignment".

Walker (1997, p.42) reviewed team performance as:

"Team performance appears to be a complex balance of the management action, undertaken through planning, co-ordination and communication, to aid and inform decision making. Various

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team members employ different levels of task or people oriented management styles and different organizational responses in terms of rigidity or flexibility towards rules and regulations. These are undertaken in response to situational factors of different groups respond in different ways depending on their management maturity and/ or willingness, as well as the perceived level of complexity of the tasks they face."

The first day in Firm X, the Main Architect showed a scene from the movie What Women Want, the scene was about working in a team and the lead character says, " Two heads are better than one and five heads are better than two, if both heads and hearts of many people meet, we will deliver, and nothing is impossible". This line made us believe what Firm X is all about on the first day itself.

1. Basic Team Division in Firm X:

a. As described earlier in Part 1, Firm X had small work teams based on projects. Different Architects under Main Architect was given project on their previous work basis and their capabilities.

b. For example, three main Associate Architects who worked from office were given projects on their specialization:

      i. Energy Efficient projects

      ii. Traditional and Conservation Projects

      iii. High-Class Residential and Resorts design projects.

c. The trainees who were selected to work in Firm X during their training period were judged by their portfolio submissions and their work pattern. Thus, they were divided accordingly to their body of work. I was part of High-Class Residential and Resorts design projects.

2. Example of Successful Project for Team Performance in Firm X:

a. Our team was given a Governmental Design Competition Project- "Circuit House". The structure of the team looked like this (with my role)(Figure 7):

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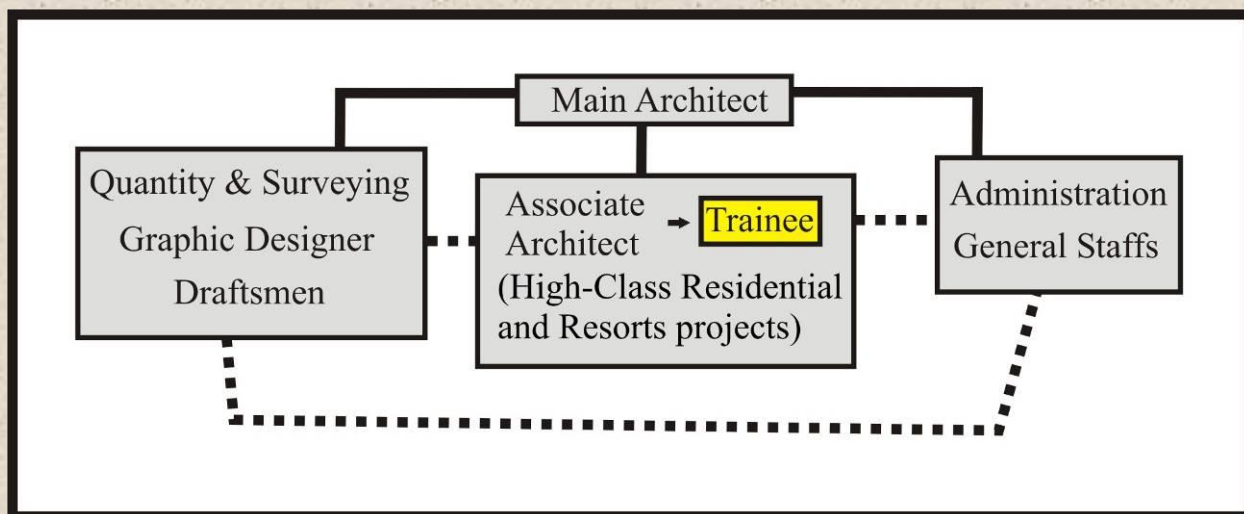International Journal of Physical and Social Sciences
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Figure 7: Structure for Circuit House Project

b. The project was very important for Firm X, as it was local government competition project. Not only that the design brief of project was laid out in such strict constraints that it was architecturally challenging, with retaining of the character of the historical identity of the city, making a barrier free design with all norms and rule. More so the ultimate deadline of 3 months for the design completion was the major issue to keep in mind.

c. So this team can be broadly described as Project Structure Team, where in project is self contained structural unit with its own staff and resources.

d. The idea of Balanced Team (Belbin, 1993): When all team members know of their roles and acknowledge the existence of other team members and their roles too, this leads to Balanced Team (**Key Issues**: Team Performance 1) .

   In this particular design project, the team consisted of all the necessary roles namely (Figure 8):

   i.   Leading roles: Associate Architects

   ii. Doing roles: Trainee, Quantity & Surveying, Graphic Designer, Draftsmen

   iii. Thinking/ Problem- Solving roles: Main Architect
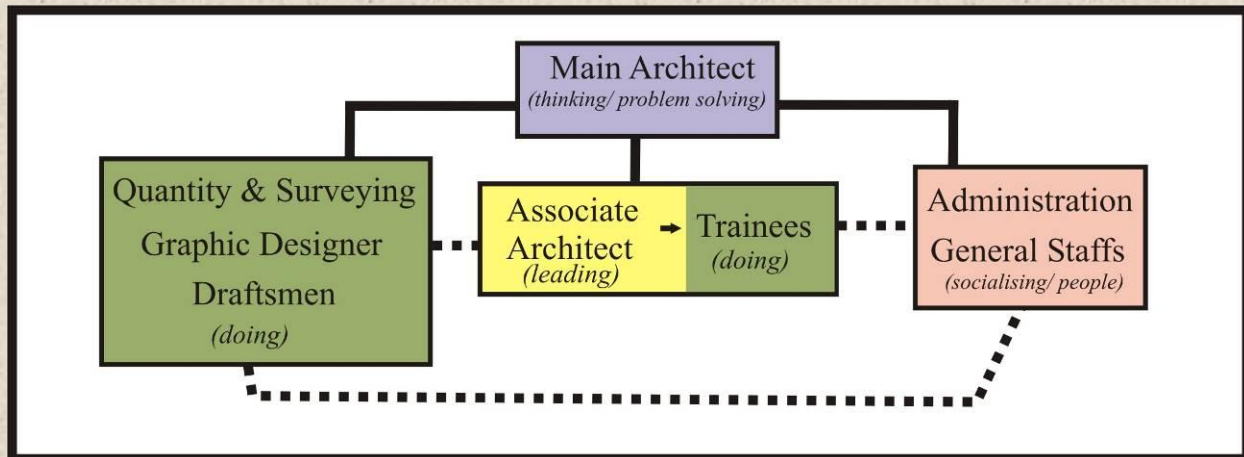
   iv. Socializing/ People roles: Administration Staff

Figure 8: Balanced Team formation for Project Circuit House

v. Leading roles: The Associate Architect was clearly the learned one about the kind of project it was, since it was interest of his/her field. He/She was the one who was coordinating and shaping the whole process of design.

vi. Doing roles: All the works were being handled by trainee, quantity & surveying, draftsmen graphic designer, whether it was measuring on the site or producing drawings. Keywords here were both implementation and completion of the design.

vii. Thinking/ Problem- Solving roles: Main Architect was helping throughout the design process as someone who was a monitor/ evaluator during different design process. He also was actively involved in solving problem whenever it arises and also giving out specialist's views.

viii. Socializing/ People role: Though not very prominent, the administration staff was highly involved in the project, can be termed as indirect help. They were the ones who communicated and acted as a network between all the roles and the clients too. They also acted as common people and expressed their views about what they like/ don't like as a commoner.

e. Life Cycle of a Team (Tuckman, 1965): Every team goes through the process of Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing and Adjourning; this is called as life cycle of a team (**Key Issues**: Team Performance 3).

   i. Forming: The design team was chosen by Main Architect according to the work he/she had done before to carry out such important project. The Forming process included the basic initial period where in Main Architect explained the importance of the project, read out the brief and handed over the work and roles to different members of the team and promised over for a commitment to fulfill the required project.

   ii. Storming: The difficult phase of the team, where all minds were clashing due to different views on the project. Different individual thinks differently and hence clarification was needed. The team objectives were particularly very clearly defined.

   iii. Norming: This cycle was the one where team developed clear identity of each other in the team and started to view the goal as shared experience and not individual basis. By the time we reached this stage, one month of three month deadline was already over. Hence, considerations should be taken to choose team member wisely and resolve of differentiations is highly necessary in the beginning only.

   iv. Performing: The total focus of the team was on output. The trust and confidence was already built on each other. Every members of the team was actively involved in their roles within the team. The trainee, quantity & surveying, draftsmen and graphic designer was producing papers and papers of designs based on Associate Architect's views, which was closely being monitored by the Main Architect. Similarly, Administration was clearly being network part of the project was keeping on with deadlines and constant remind of the team focus and pros and cons in the project.

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v. Adjourning: Team completed the whole project within the given deadline and its overall objectives. This life cycle though highly neglected is important one. The Firm X held a presentation of the completed project and discussed the positive and negative attributes of the project as well as the work that went into it.

f. Barriers in the team performance: Every team performance goes through some barriers within the life cycle of the project. The design project was also challenging but not without few barriers.

i. Strategic: Initial barrier was lack of shared goals and unclear understanding of different partner's vision and values (**Key Issues**: Team Performance 4).

ii. Cultural: Then other barrier which came into force was lack of communication from client's side, during mid phase of the project and late address by them on every problematic issues leading to delays in works (**Key Issues**: Team Performance 5).

iii. Organizational: The Main Architect left for other city for few weeks and that time the project totally lost its grip, because due to lack of access, the whole regular monitoring and evaluation process went haywire (**Key Issues**: Team Performance 6).

g. Enablers in the team performance: Likewise, barrier, the project had some key enablers which helped to deliver. Thamain (2004) figured the enabler's hierarchy for team performance:

Effective communication; trust, respect, and credibility; overall team performance; and, interesting, stimulating work.

i. The project given was challenging and interesting to the core with many research opportunities, not only for trainee but for graphic

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designers also, for whom all was given was theme as monochromatic, and also surveyors since it was based in heritage site.

ii. Time factor: The time limit was the biggest barrier as such for the project since; the large project like this was given very less time, but again as the project progressed; it acted as enabler, making everyone believe in work and deadline importance and got team more closely.

iii. The clear balance distribution of the work was another enabler in the design project. It made work more simplified, easy to approach with targets set out for each team member leading to common goal.

iv. The involvement of Main Architect, esp. during last one month as a monitor and evaluator reinforcing the idea of important and dynamic team leader.

v. Accessibility of team member was very easy and effective with strong communication and knowledge sharing.

3. Team Leader: The Main Architect

a. Grisham (2006), states that leader nurtures the growth of a team culture using clear, open, and responsive communication, including articulation of the goals and 'storytelling' to foster team development.

b. The Main Architect was a capable leader in the true sense. There is always a strong relationship between leader and its followers. He enjoyed his influence over various issues in the Firm, be it on past, present or future projects and its endeavors.

c. Successful leadership is highly important in design and construction industry. The cut throat competition in the market, newer complex projects and developments happening around are key issues here. Firm X's Main Architect was highly charged about new innovation and surroundings. Every trainee was given list of presentation to do in the office every week and tell people about new ideas around

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the world with the help of Main Architect. These effective ways lead him to introduce Sustainable and Green Building Concept in Firm about few years ago.

d. Blake and Mounton's leadership grid (1964): This leadership grid tells about different Leadership style. It focuses on leaders who either focus on task concern or people concern. There is a balance between task and people concern also but that also sounds more or less like compromise since leadership is based more on decisiveness.

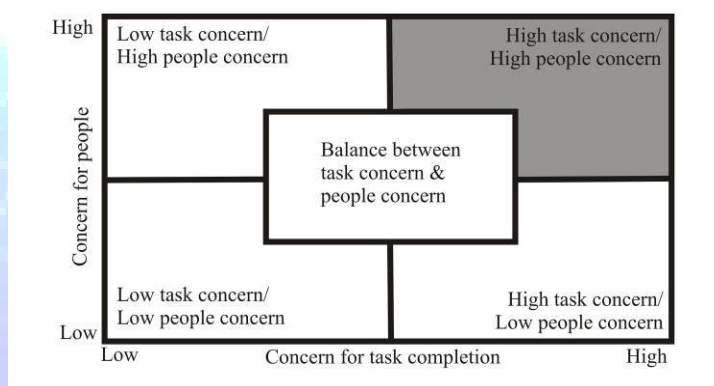   i. Firm X' Main Architect belongs to high task concern and high people concern leader (Figure 9).

Figure 9: Firm X leader indicated in colour in grid

    ii. Such grid space, where in Main Architect position came, belongs to Team manager kind of leader; who has strong emphasis on task and people. He himself gives out his hundred percent participation and acts as a strong team member. Open out the problems and clarifies it too.

4. Exploitative and Explorative learning: Another key issue for learning that Firm X believed in was:

a. Exploring its' own capabilities and Exploring new possibilities.

b. Before any project was started, there used to be review of earlier projects, on what went wrong and what went right. Hence, what can be done for increasing performance competency in the future.

c. Similarly, research and innovation in current trends and up to date market study was being carried out to learn about new techniques in the world of construction and analyzed it for current and future work.

5. **Strong Client Focus:** Firm X strongly focused on strong client focus, hence it always considered Client as a part of team as it believed a true project can only deliver if client is satisfied and there is capable give and take relationship.

6. **Tradition and Innovation:** Another of the important issue Firm X made out was the tricky subject of Tradition & Innovation. Innovation seems to come in faster rate today than ever before. So keeping an eye open around is always favorable. Crouch and Johnson (2000) stated that while we always seek to create something new, we will always hark back at the familiar and traditional. Hence, Firm X believed that until and unless there is comfort level formed in new innovation, combining it with traditional system is the best way to rise up. As described in the project earlier, the main success story for that project was the combination of old and new architectural features and systems.

Crouch and Johnson (2000) further adds up the fact that no man made concept ever becomes obsolete- it will always resurface in another time, perhaps in the form of something else. It explains the concept of Sustainable and Green building concept which is going back to the roots of using simple materials and systems for design.

3. Recommendations for Team Performance & Cultural Issues for Firm X

1. **Team Performance**:

	Key Issues	Recommendations
1.	**Unbalanced Team**	First key enabler for team performance is choosing the right team members. As a member in Firm X, we always get to hear about other trainees and their work, few projects in Firm X suffered due to unable team member in construction process that is on site. The balanced team means the proper identification of team member and their capabilities. The keyword should be awareness and acceptance of each other presence. Addition of strengths and managing weakness

		within team reinforces better team. Proper division of work and identifying the leader roles, doing roles, problem solving and people roles lead to proper end results and effective coordination. Conservation team in Firm X used to always get set back considering the confusion of works between various trainees and different projects.
2.	**Diversity amongst team member**	Each team members should be importantly different from each other on rational level as well as behavioral aspects. Lawrence and Lorsch (1967) stated that differences, in such contexts, imply specializations and, hence diversity, so integration is vital but also the most difficult thing to achieve.
3.	**Going through the life cycle of team**	Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing and Adjourning. This one is tricky part of team performance as this one leads to end product and whole success of project is dependant of this attribute. Any kind of mismanagement or blockage might lead the team to Adjourn in any stage and start again afresh which happened a lot in other projects in Firm X.
4.	**Strategic Issue- Goal**	The team members should be highly goal oriented. They should focus on goal congruence and work effectively to achieve it. Erez and Zidon (1984) found that goals should be challenging but not enormously so such that performance improved as goals became reasonably challenging and commitment to them increased; however, further increases in goal difficulty resulted in declining commitment and performance. The competition project was the right mix of the challenge one project can be. But Firm X was handling various high tech Green Buildings project, and since it was new concept around the project became highly challenging and went on for long, making team member less focused and committed.

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5.	**Cultural Issue-Communication and Top Management Support**	Lack of communication from client's side can lead to serious halt in the project process hence a section of organization should be always be up to date from client's point of view and be in contact too. Also effective contact with Main Architect should be maintained and his support should be used positively and fully during project process.
6..	**Organizational Issues-Regular Monitoring and Evaluation**	The only time Main Architect lacked in his duty was when he went away for few weeks during the design competition process. The project was halted for few days even though there was a time constraint as there was lack of monitoring and guidance on the design.
7.	**Organizational Issues-Incentives and Pay Scale**	One of the major disadvantages of Firm X was on the subject of incentives, pay scale and rewards. The pay-scale was very less except for the trainees. Everyone liked working in such environment of the office and praised about it, but no one worked in the office for more than few years because of the low pay scale. Moreover, there were no rewards or any other kind of incentives to cover up the low pay scale. Increase in the pay scale not also bring monetary gain but also gives motivation and brings interest to work further and with more dedication.
8.	**Organizational Issues-Relaxed**	Too much freedom was given to people in office making the atmosphere relaxed for most of the time, hence not taking seriously any project given for first few weeks. This lead to serious problem in some teams where the lack of commitment happened and project was suffered because of this.
9.	**Authority**	The competition project as mentioned earlier was smoothly riding until the last few deadline weeks. The Associate Architect started with giving out too much work on draftsmen making helplessness and hence interest of work was lessened. Therefore maintenance of friendly behaviors throughout also helps in team performance.
10.	**Ice- breaking Session**	One thing that Firm X was really good was in Ice-breaking

		session it conducted during the initial process of projects; sometimes leading to outdoor activities to know each other well. Quite commendable step forward, which can be used well by organizations for building up effective communication and the comfort level within the organization.

2. **Culture** (Generally based on Hofstede (2001)):

	Key Issues	**Recommendations**
1.	**Power Distance**	High Power Distance leads to more fear and authority surroundings. Even though Main Architect in Firm X never raised his voice, the whole idea of boss being the head has been head-set hence leading to fewer conversations with the leader and the sense of fear. Not only that in low Power Distance there is no difference between manual jobs and clerical jobs, which doesn't hold true for high Power Distance. Wide salary range between top and bottom of organizations.
2.	**Uncertainty Avoidance**	Having low Uncertainty means feeling les threatened by unknown circumstances. Having low Uncertainty is equally good and bad; innovations are welcomed but not taken seriously until and unless point is being proved as in case presentations to be kept every week in Firm X. There seems to be weak loyalty to employer; short average duration of employment as seen in Firm X.
3.	**Individualism and Collectivism**	Collectivism is always the step ahead in the case of team work; hence it works fine for architectural firm like Firm X as in all the work are team related and hardly any work is associated with individualism. Not only that it helps in organization culture with people know more about each other maintaining harmonious surrounding in the organization.

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4.	**Masculinity and Femininity**	Firm X was totally divided into equal when talking about Masculinity and Femininity. In fact, all the Associate Architects were female and hence there was no difference in job status and pay-scale. But somehow it also created a bit difference in organizations, since there was less emphasis on earnings and recognitions hence leading to less incentives and rewards as such.
5.	**Long- Versus Short-Term Orientation**	Having Long Term Orientation made Firm X les risk taking, so most of the time it followed the tried and tested formula of churning of projects which worked most of the time but failed at some time too.
6.	**Company Culture**	As stated earlier Firm X is complete Clan Culture, the atmosphere within the organization was friendly and relaxed but doesn't give a feeing of office culture as such. Too much flexibility was given around inside the organizations. Though there were set of rules, but it was not formalized as such. The organizations did not stick their necks out and take risks even though it is necessary sometimes in given projects as in The Adhocracy Culture. Firm X could have taken out basic positive points from each Company Culture and reform itself as Hybrid Culture.

4. Conclusion:

The concept of a team is vital is every organization in today's context. Firm X believed in it so completely too. Various projects had able team and many had unbalanced team. The main part of team performance is to be alert about goal achievement. Similarly, dynamic leader also helps team to bind together through thick and thin. Effective communications, decision making and trust amongst team member are few of the enablers to team performance. Similarly, risk taking once in a while for betterment of project is equally important unlike Firm X. Equal opportunity amongst team member nurtures the working conditions and participation.

No culture is good or bad. It's all about believing in it and carrying forward. Hofstede (2005) defined culture as a collective phenomenon, which distinguishes one category of people

from another- on national and organizational basis. Therefore striking a correct balance between cultures in any area would always end up with favorable end products be it in national level or organizational level.

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